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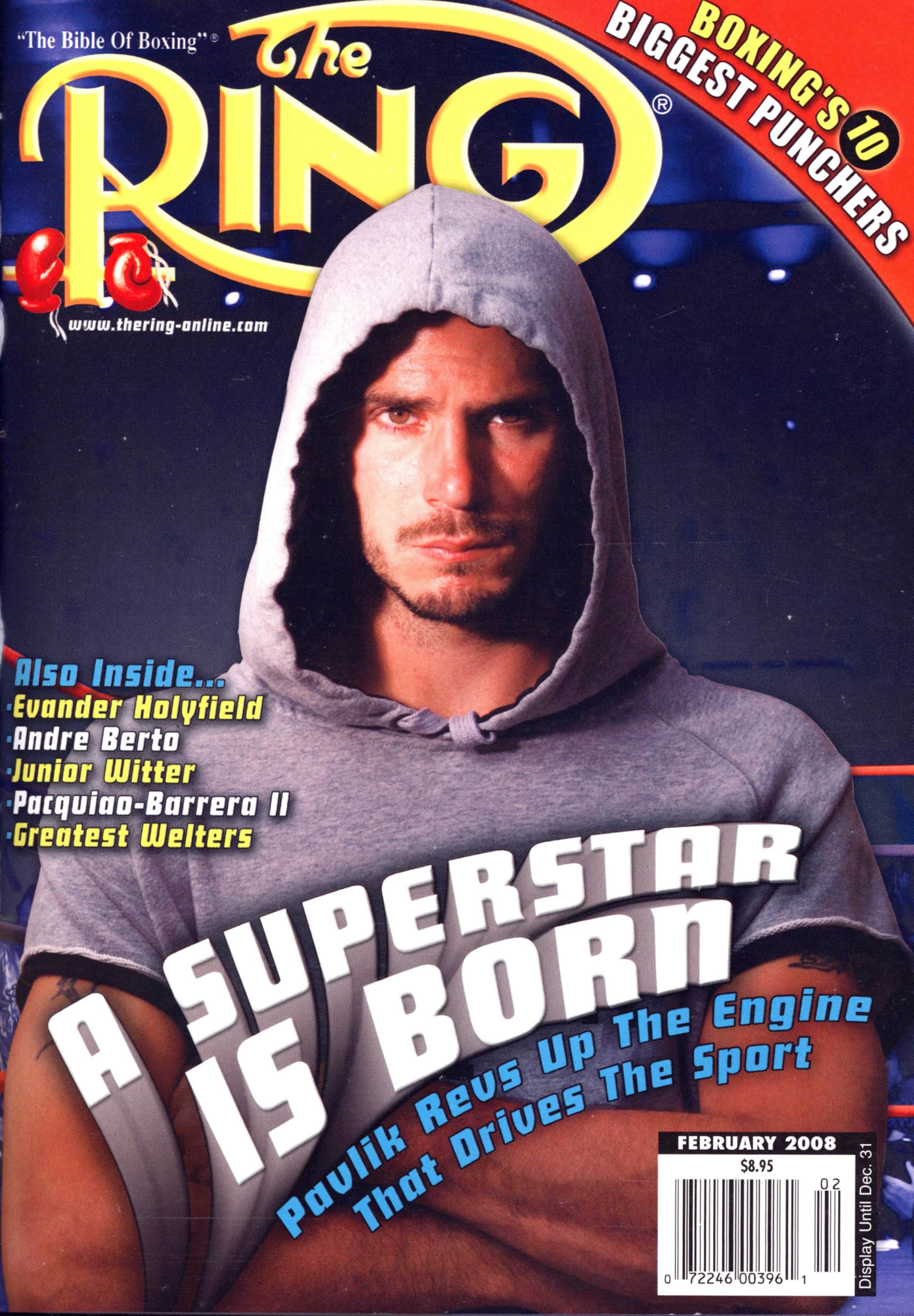

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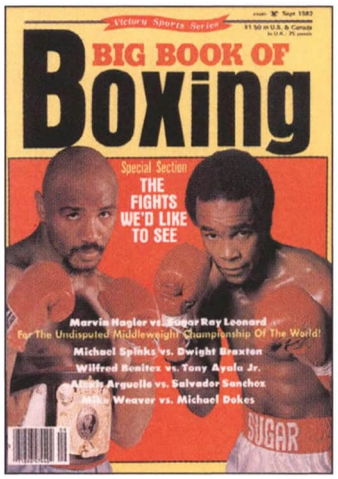

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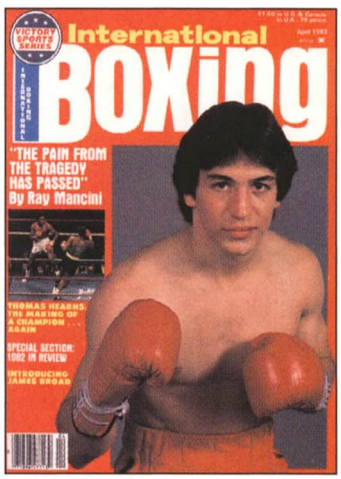

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Chip . . . Gerry Cooney (l) chips onto 18th green while Sir Henry Cooper (r) is enroute to next tee.

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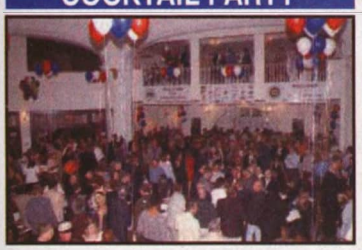

Stars . . . Boxers and fans enjoy VIP cocktail party reception.

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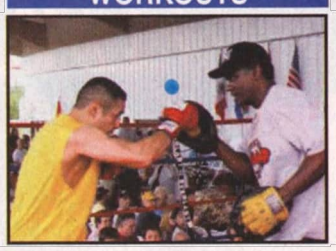
Ricardo Lopez points to his championship trunks.

WORKOUTS



Oscar Diaz works the bag mitts with Tommy Brooks during public workout.

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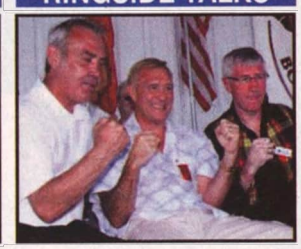

Minter, Stracey, and Buchanan provide stories.

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Opening Shot

A Fluid Situation

There's blood and sweat flying everywhere as Librado Andrade connects with a straight right against Yusaf Mack in the seventh round of their super middleweight fight on the Pacquiao-Barrera II undercard in Las Vegas. This punch helped convince the referee to stop the fight, and as great a punch as it was, it was not even close to being the best of the fight. Mack landed that one, in the opening round, sending the favored Andrade crashing to the canvas.

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

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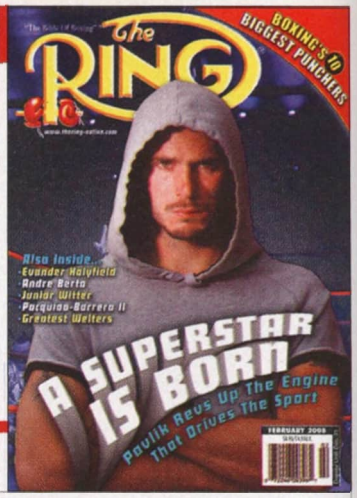

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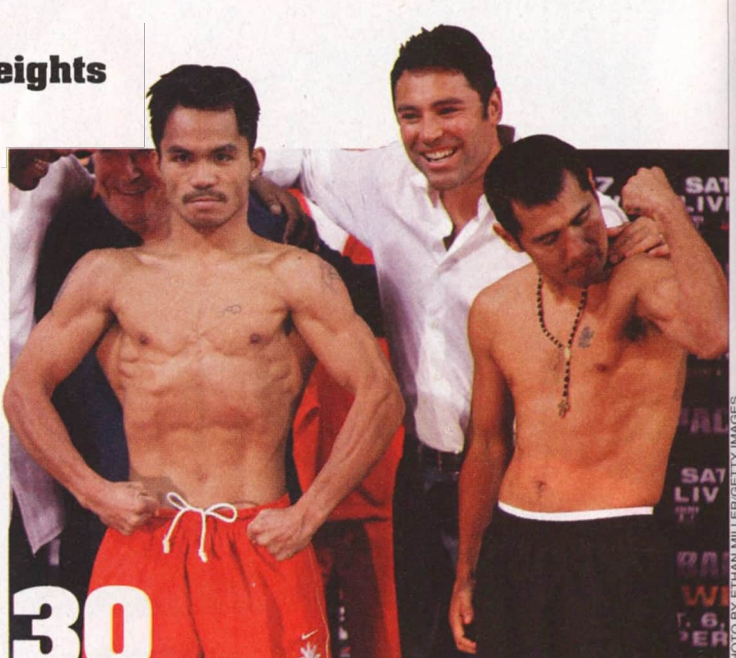

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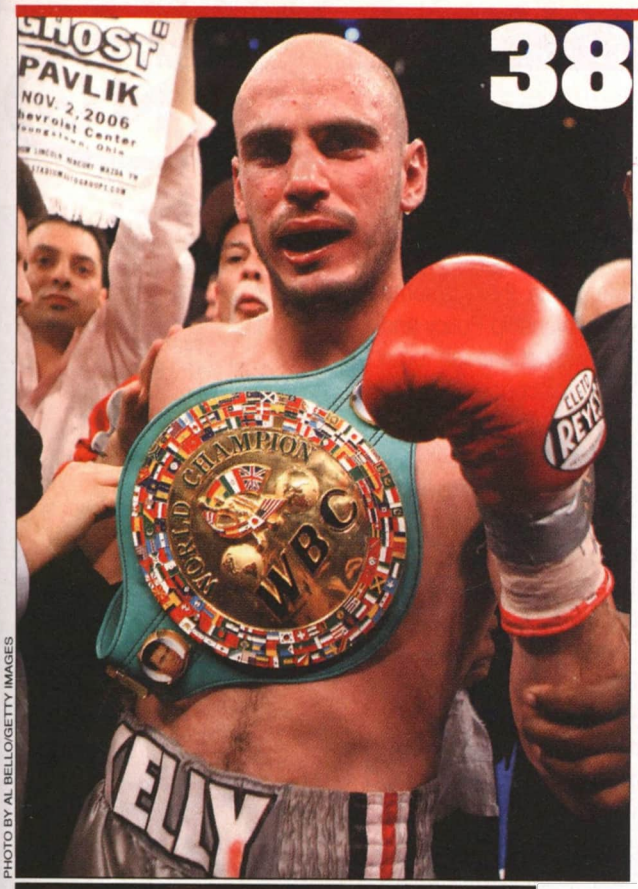

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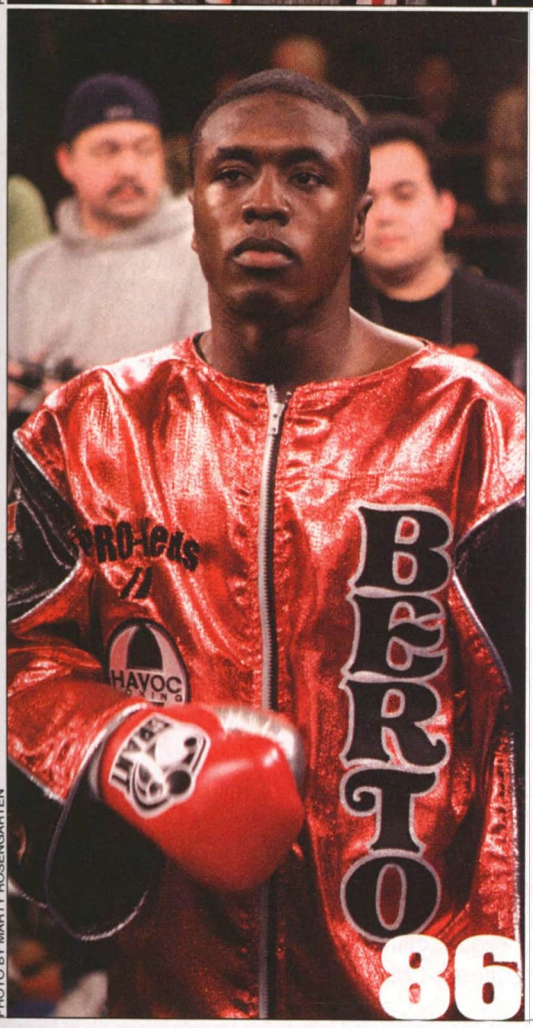

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

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The RING

Judging by a number of recent comments from readers and the media, there is some confusion about what THE RING is trying to achieve with its Championship Policy and how we should go about accomplishing our mission. While there is not enough room to answer everybody individually, I have addressed a handful of typical concerns in the hope of providing a better understanding of our basic philosophy.

•Is THE RING a sanctioning body?

Absolutely not! THE RING does not sanction fights, charges no sanctioning fees, appoints no officials, forces no manadatories, and strips no champion. What we do is recognize a bout as a championship fight and the winner as champion. THE RING belt is the emblem of that status. No money changes hands; nobody forces anybody to do anything.

•Isn't it true, as 15rounds.com columnist Michael Swann wrote, that THE RING "has absolutely no power to get two contenders in the ring" and that if we "had any real clout, [Joel] Casamayor would be fighting Juan Diaz and [Bernard] Hopkins would be fighting Chad Dawson."?

What folks who hunger for an honest and workable alternative to the alphabet madness need to understand is that THE RING does *not* want "clout" if it means stripping champions of titles they've won in the ring. You can't fix a problem by employing the same counterproductive measures that caused the problem in the first place. Regardless of who is swinging the ax, stripping is a slippery slope that leads directly to the same sewer where the alphabet organizations reside.

Instead, THE RING prefers to use the journalistic bully pulpit to cajole, goad, or embarrass champions into defending against the most worthy challengers. In fact, the Monday after Juan Diaz beat Julio Diaz, THE RING Senior Writer William Dettloff utilized his weekly column on thering-online.com to advocate a Casamayor-Juan Diaz fight. Will Bill's column force a Casamayor-Diaz showdown? Of course not. But it might nudge the fighters in the right direction, and it certainly won't further muddy the waters the way the WBC did when it stripped Casamayor because he wouldn't cave to its demands.

•Having dropped the alphabet ratings from the magazine years ago, why does THE RING continue to mention their titles and show photographs of fighters wearing their belts?

Despite THE RING's anti-alphabet stance, we can't neglect another part of our responsibility—reporting the news. Like it or not, these nefarious cartels and their titleholders, many of whom are worthy fighters, are part of the news. And if the fight is good, the winner deserves to have an image of his celebratory moment published, even if he's holding an alphabet belt over his head. It's the fight and fighter we are honoring, not the belt.

Hopefully, the alphabet gangs will eventually be eliminated or pushed so far to the margins that all references can be eliminated, but we're not at that point—yet.

•Steve Hudgins, who writes the "Ask The Watchdog" column for doghouseboxing.com, recently posted an open letter to THE RING, asking, among other things, why THE RING and all the TV networks that broadcast boxing don't join forces to purge boxing of the sanctioning bodies.

Well, Steve, I've wondered the exact same thing. Maybe your next open letter should be addressed to the suits at HBO, Showtime, Versus, Fox, Univision, Telefutura, and Telemundo because, besides ESPN, which has been in THE RING's corner from the start, the networks are the alphabet bandits' principal enablers. Sure, promoters, managers, and fighters are often complicit, but it's the networks that control the purse strings and, therefore, have the most power.

Nigel Collins
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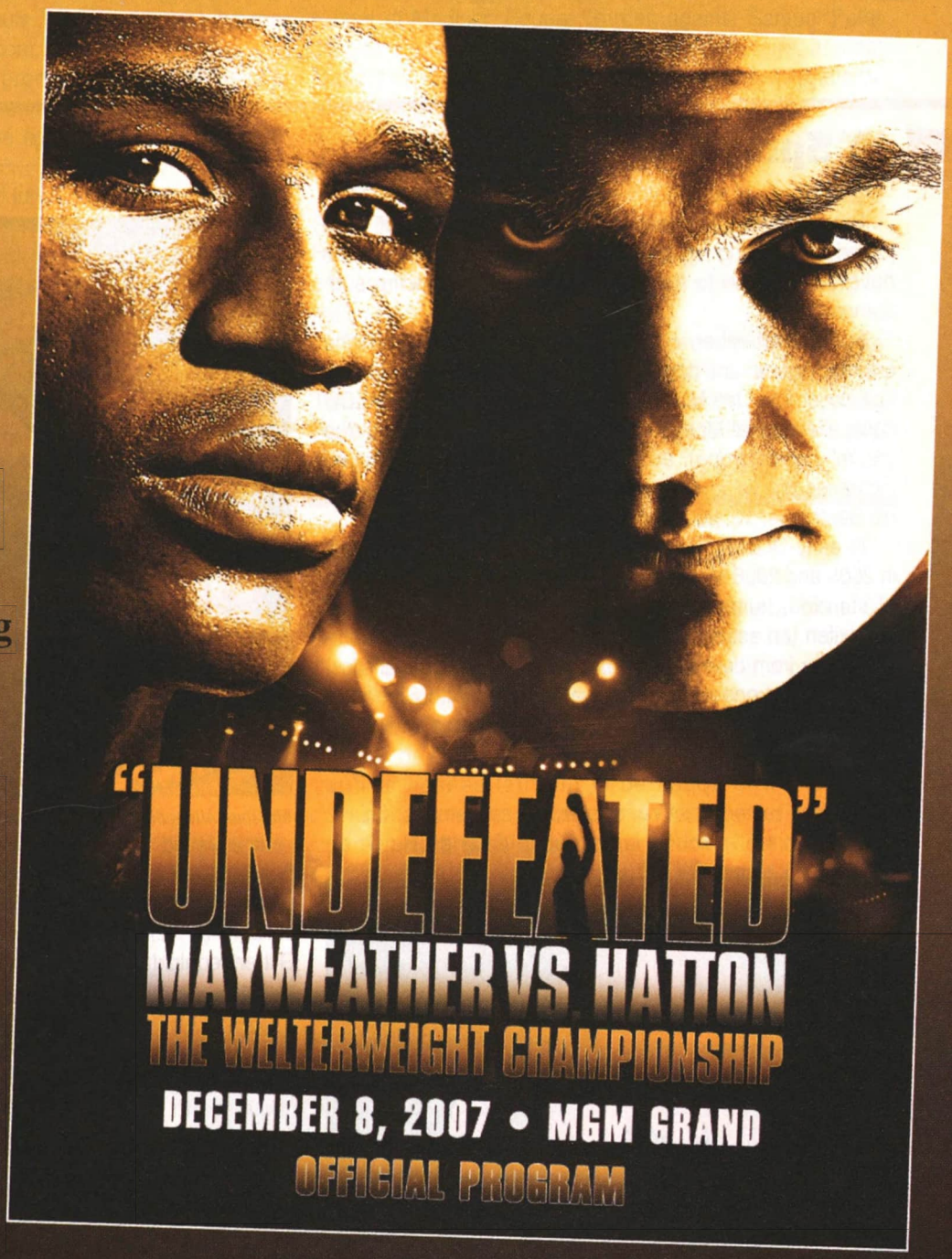

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A Spreading Epidemic

Shane Mosley, Jameel McCine, and Joey Gilbert have joined the growing list of professional boxers whose names have been linked to various performance-enhancing substances.

In late-September, *Sports Illustrated* reported that during an international anti-doping conference in Colorado Springs last November, Jeff Novitzky, lead investigator in the BALCO case, alleged that Mosley began using "the clear" (THG), "the cream" (testosterone), and EPO, a hormone that artificially increases the volume of red blood cells, two months before his September 13, 2003, bout with Oscar De La Hoya.

In early-October, the New York *Daily News* reported that in 2005 and 2006 McCline received more than $12,000 worth of steroids, human growth hormones, testosterone, and tamoxifen (an estrogen blocker used by steroid users to prevent them from developing feminine physical characteristics) from Infinity Longevity, a clinic associated with Signature Pharmacy, which currently faces criminal charges for illegally selling performance-enhancing drugs.

Gilbert, who appeared in the first season of *The Contender*, tested positive for steroids and amphetamines following his first-round knockout of Charles Howe on September 21, in Reno, Nevada, and has been temporarily suspended by the Nevada State Athletic Commission. According to Keith Kizer, executive director of the NSAC, Gilbert could face a fine and/or revocation of his boxing license.

McCline: Allegedly spent $12,000 on performance-enhancers

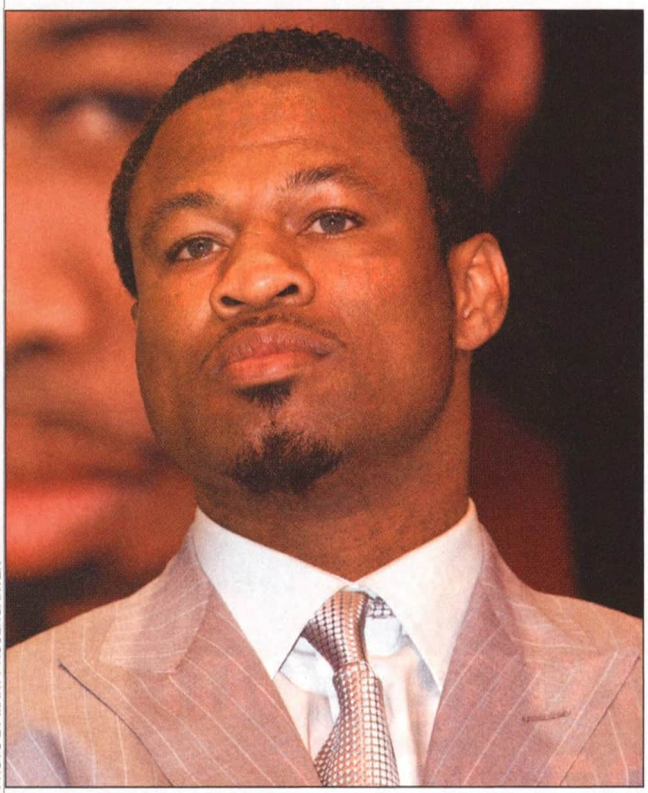
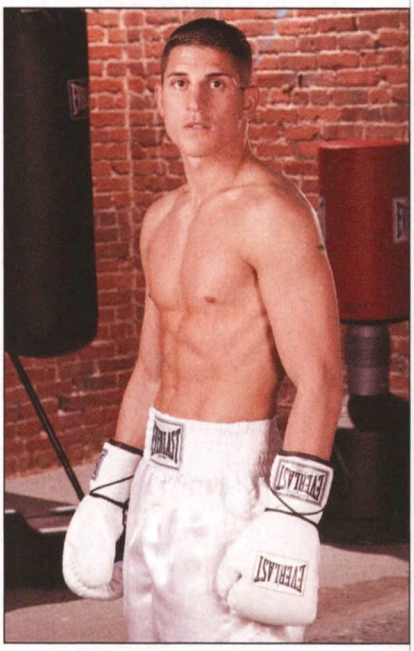


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Mosley: Old allegations resurface

Four years ago, when Mosley's name first surfaced in connection with performance-enhancing drugs, he testified in front of the BALCO grand jury and said he'd only obtained legal supplements from BALCO. But following the *Sports Illustrated* article, Mosley said he unknowingly took the substances, after visiting BALCO founder Victor Conte with strength and conditioning coach Daryl Hudson.


Gilbert: Failed Nevada drug test

"Yes, some of the substances they are talking about were being used as part of my workouts, but I didn't know what the hell it was," Mosley told ESPN.com.

Ironically, Mosley is now promoted by De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions, but even though De La Hoya lost a close decision to Mosley in the fight in question, he is not angry with his former opponent.

"He went in front of a grand jury and gave his story, and he even took a lie detector test and he passed with flying colors," De La Hoya told Robert Morales in an interview posted on 15rounds.com. "What a coincidence that this pops up once again when another situation of mine personally is happening. And I believe that something was behind this to tarnish Golden Boy's image."

De La Hoya was referring to the controversial images of him that were posted on the Internet a few weeks before the Mosley allegations hit the news.

McCline, who was allowed to proceed with his October 6 bout at Madison Square Garden against Samuel Peter despite the accusations made by the *Daily News*, has not made any public statements addressing the allegations. McCline's drug tests administered by the New York State Athletic Commission before and after the Peter bout were negative.

Gilbert, who also promoted his bout with Howe at Grand Sierra Resort, must appear at a hearing before the five-member commission. "There's no doubt I'm going to be exonerated," said Gilbert. "All I'm saying is there's an absolute explanation for this."

Other prominent boxers who have been caught with illegal performance-enhancing drugs in their system include, James Toney (twice), Fernando Vargas, Roy Jones (and opponent Richard Hall), Frans Botha, Orlando Salido, Omar Nino, and Mariano Carrera.

Rhode Island Licenses Mesi

The latest chapter of the Joe Mesi saga occurred at the Twin River Event Center in Lincoln, Rhode Island. Mesi easily defeated Shannon Miller on October 12 by first-round knockout. Rhode Island joins Arkansas, West Virginia, and Michigan, along with Quebec and Puerto Rico, as territories where Mesi has been sanctioned to fight. Mesi was suspended from boxing after suffering brain injuries during a 2004 bout with Vassiliy Jirov in Las Vegas.

Rhode Island promoter Jimmy Burchfield believes the Ocean State did the right thing in licensing Mesi, even though the fighter has been denied in California, New Jersey, Nevada, and New York.

"He has been examined by the top neurosurgeons in the world," said Burchfield, citing an evaluation done by Dr. Robert Cantu of Boston's Emerson Hospital. "I asked them for reports and a new MRI. We will provide Dr. Cantu's report to any interested officials or people in the media. Dr. Cantu's report states that Joe has no more of a chance of suffering a brain injury than he did before the Jirov fight."

"I have spoken to the director in Rhode Island," said Tim Lueckenhoff, president of the Association of Boxing Commissions. "Information from the examining physicians indicated no medical information which would allow the Rhode Island commission to deny a license."

Still, Dr. Margaret Goodman, formerly of the Nevada State Athletic Commission, was disappointed by Rhode Island's decision. "This just perpetuates the problems for boxing in having no federal or national commission, an ineffectual Association of Boxing Commissions, and no one stepping up to enhance the current federal legislation that is already in place," said Goodman, who feels Rhode Island's ruling will have no bearing on Nevada, California, or New York.

"Those states understand the risk that Mr. Mesi faces each time he's struck in the head," she added. "The only way their restriction on Mesi would change would be if it were medically proven that a fighter who has suffered two subdural hematomas is not at increased risk of a third. So far, there has been no medical evidence to prove that. Until that time, I would hope that states like Nevada and New York would continue to do what is in the best interest of the fighter."

Said Burchfield: "My credibility is on the line, and I am 100 percent satisfied."

—Don Stradley

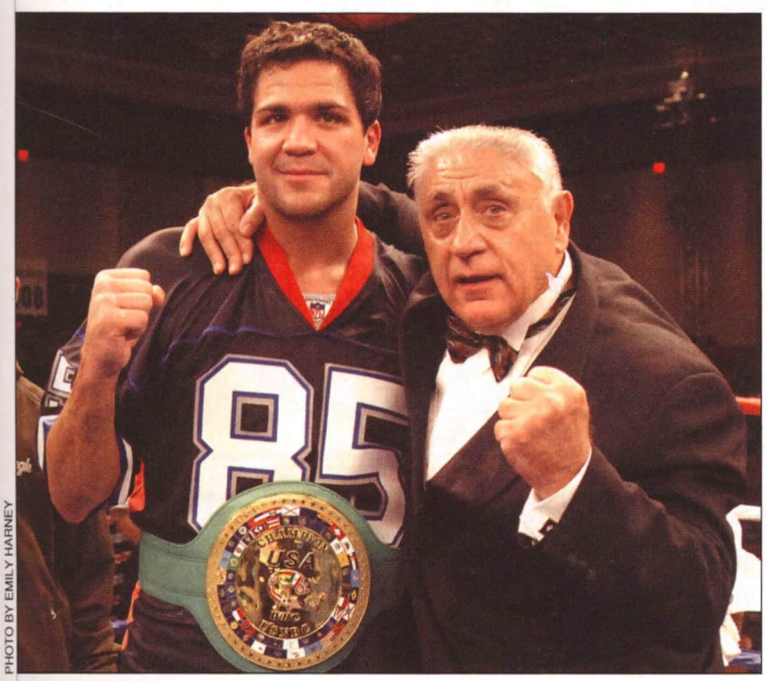


PHOTO BY EMILY HARNEY

Mesi and Burchfield have teamed up

TV Fights of the Month

Compiled By Martin Mulcahey

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
9/14/07	Fernando Trejo W 10 Juan Ramon Cruz	Telefutura	jl	B-	C	C
Cruz' best punch was a low blow that would make a eunuch wince						
9/16/07	Edgar Sosa KO 9 Lorenzo Trejo	TV Azteca	jfl	B	B-	C+
Viloria win was no fluke; Sosa undefeated in last four years						
9/16/07	Jorge Arce KO 6 Tomas Rojas	TV Azteca	jb	B-	C	B
Worryingly behind on points, bodyshot rescues Arce						
9/21/07	Chris Arreola KO 3 Thomas Hayes	Telefutura	h	C	C	B-
Young heavy reminds us of elderly Duran: soft body and hard hands						
9/28/07	Eduardo Escobedo KO 6 Jose Mendoza	Telefutura	f	C-	C	C
Another undefeated Colombian falls apart in American debut						
9/28/07	Daniel Ponce De Leon KO 5 Reynaldo Lopez	Telefutura	jf	B	C	C
When will Ponce De Leon attempt to avenge loss to Caballero?						
9/29/07	Joseph Agbeko KO 7 Luis Perez	Showtime	b	A-	B	C+
Doctor forced to rescue Perez from further punishment						
9/29/07	Chad Dawson KO 4 Epifanio Mendoza	Showtime	lh	A-	D	C
Late substitute kayoed early						
9/29/07	Andre Berto KO 11 David Estrada	HBO	w	B	B	B-
Brave Estrada is the most entertaining also-ran in boxing						
9/29/07	**Kelly Pavlik KO 7 Jermain Taylor**	**HBO**	**m**	**A+**	**A**	**A**
Killer instinct proves crucial; Pavlik showed it, Taylor didn't						
10/04/07	Urbano Antillon KO 2 Wilson Alcorro	Versus	l	C	C+	C
Impressive first outing against a southpaw						
10/04/07	Fernando Montiel KO 12 Luis Melendez	Versus	jb	A-	B+	A
Dueling knockdowns, in 6th and 7th rounds, just one facet of a fantastic fight						
10/05/07	Ramon Montano W 10 Cristian Favela	Telefutura	jw	D	C	C-
The wind in the outdoor arena delivered more sting than the fighters						
10/05/07	Michel Rosales KO 1 Americo Santos	Telefutura	jw	B	B	B
Perfect example of accurate punching overcoming volume punching						
10/05/07	Mickey Bey KO 2 Castulo Gonzalez	Showtime	jl	C	C	B-
Speed and impressive left hook makes Bey a fighter to keep an eye on						
10/05/07	Yonnhy Perez KO 2 Alexander Fedorov	Showtime	b	C+	C	B-
If you can box like Perez, you can spell your first name any way you want						
10/06/07	Samuel Peter W 12 Jameel McCline	Showtime	h	A-	B	B
Peter given interim belt outside the ring, struggles to keep it inside						
10/06/07	Librado Andrade KO 7 Yusaf Mack	PPV	sm	B	B+	A-
Brawling duo steal the show; Andrade will always win battle of chins						
10/06/07	Steve Forbes W 10 Francisco Bojado	PPV	w	B-	B	B-
Forbes in the midst of a career resurrection; Bojado in a downward spiral						
10/06/07	Steven Luevano W 12 Antonio Davis	PPV	f	A-	B+	C+
Luevano solid but unspectacular in first alphabet defense						
10/06/07	Manny Pacquiao W 12 Marco Antonio Barrera	PPV	jl	A	A-	B
Barrera's retirement announcement as predictable as the result						
10/12/07	Juan Mercedes KO 12 Jose Bernal	Telefutura	jb	C+	C+	C+
Bernal switches between orthodox and southpaw; Mercedes hits both versions easily						
10/12/07	Alex De Jesus KO 4 Bulmaro Solis	Telefutura	w	C	C+	C+
De Jesus has a good punch for a guy with no pectoral muscles						
10/13/07	Juan Diaz KO 9 Julio Diaz	HBO	l	A-	A	B
Baby Bull's pressure forces second consecutive titlist to quit in unification bout						
10/13/07	Dimitri Kirilov W 12 Jose Navarro	PPV	jb	A-	A-	A-
Former U.S Olympian falls to 0-3 in foreign title challenges						
10/13/07	Sultan Ibragimov W 12 Evander Holyfield	PPV	h	A-	B	C+
Will we still be writing about Holyfield becoming the oldest heavyweight title challenger in 2009?						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net;Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino; Versus

Boxing Bookshelf

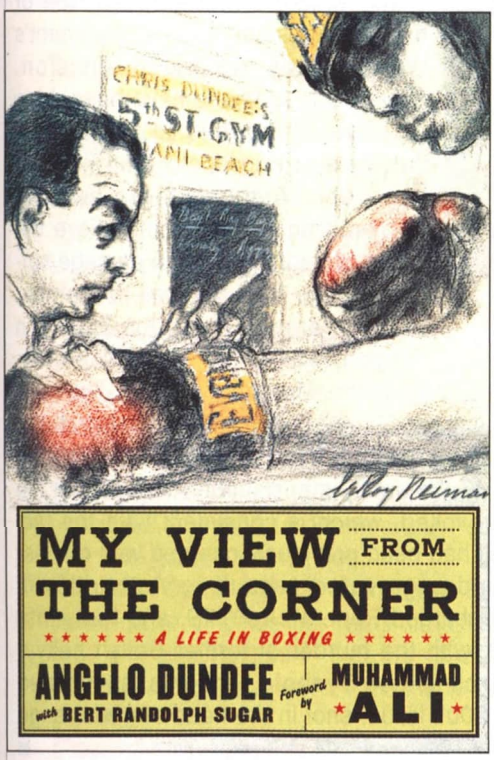
Angelo Dundee forged a Hall of Fame career, training champions such as Carmen Basilio, Willie Pastrano, and Jose Napoles. But it's his work with Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard that made him a legend.

As we learn in his new autobiography, *My View From The Corner: A Life In Boxing* (McGraw Hill, 307 pages, $24.95), Dundee's rich legacy in boxing has spanned more than five decades. During the opening chapters, Dundee fondly recalls his apprenticeship under Chickie Ferrera and how he eagerly soaked up knowledge from celebrated boxing gurus such as Whitey Bimstein, Freddie Brown, Charlie Goldman, and Ray Arcel. If nothing else, Dundee's retrospective confirms him as one of the sport's modest gentleman and true good guys. Ironically, it may be for that very same reason that the book falls short. For someone who enjoyed such privileged access to the game's inner workings and its elite fighters, *My View* is notably lacking in insight.

While there are many interesting and funny anecdotes, Dundee seems to go to great lengths to not divulge too much for fear of offending the many friends and acquaintances he's made along the way. Unfortunately, the net result is a book, co-written with Bert Sugar, that is a breezy and entertaining rehash of many of the historical times and events Dundee has been attached to during his tenure in the Sweet Science.

This may not entirely be Dundee's fault. Ali is arguably the most well documented man in sport. But given that Dundee dedicates approximately half of the book to his years with Ali, historians will find themselves frustrated by the startling lack of new material.

Similarly, we get an entertaining recap of Leonard's career, with a few interesting insights on how Dundee mapped out winning strategies over Marvin Hagler and Roberto Duran, but there is not much we learn about Sugar Ray that we didn't already know. There are, however, some uncharacteristic salvos lobbed at Leonard's business manager, Mike Trainer, and members of his entourage. According to Dundee, Trainer acted in less than good faith by nullifying his original contract with the Leonard camp. Although he still thinks highly of his one-time charge, Dundee sadly admits that Leonard did little to intervene.



In sum, Dundee is as much a psychologist as he is an educator, tactician, and occasional disciplinarian, and he does an appreciable job of breaking down the differing psyches of the boxers he's trained. In a poignant close to the book, Dundee recalls his work with George Foreman as he sought to regain the heavyweight championship 20 years after his emotionally scarring defeat to Ali.

Casual sports fan will find Dundee's book fertile reading. It's accessibly written and often humorous. But, unfortunately, seasoned fight buffs are likely to be disappointed.

—Paul Salgado

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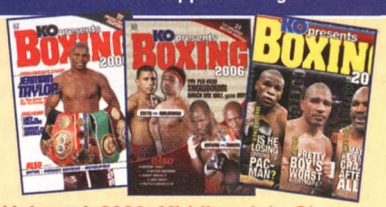

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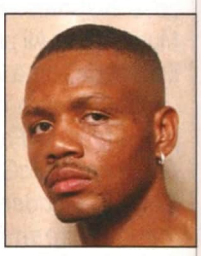
Outside the Ropes

Ginepri Capital Partners, a New York-based hedge fund, has bought the rights to **Sugar Ray Robinson**'s life story from the boxer's family and plans to produce a movie, which will be released in early-2009. "Our family is so proud that his story will finally be told, shared with his fans and friends, and be memorialized for future generations," said the fighter's son, **Ray Robinson Jr.** ... Welterweight champion **Floyd Mayweather** was voted off *Dancing With The Stars* on October 16, making him the fourth celebrity to leave the popular TV show this season. "It was marvelous just being here, just to get to this plateau," the departing Mayweather told the audience. "We had a great time. Thank you so much." In other reality TV news, former WBA featherweight titleholder **Barry McGuigan** outlasted several celebrity chefs to win the ITV show *Hell's Kitchen* ... Promoter **Bob Arum** returned **Oscar De La Hoya**'s Olympic gold medal to the fighter at a ceremony held at White Memorial Medical Center in East Los Angeles. De La Hoya had given the medal he'd won at the 1992 Summer Games in Barcelona, Spain, to Arum on the promoters 65th birthday in 1996. The medal will be displayed at the Cecilia Gonzalez De La Hoya Cancer Center, which is named after De La Hoya's mother, who died of cancer in 1991 ... Three days after her son won a 12-round decision over **Marco Antonio Barrera** in Las Vegas, **Dionisia Pacquiao**, the mother of **Manny Pacquiao**, was rushed to St. Elizabeth Hospital in General Santos City, Philippines, because she was having difficulty breathing. The attending physician, **Dr. Lamberto Chomi**, said the problem was stress-related. A few days later, the Filipino superstar led Team Pac-Man to a 97-95 victory over the Cebu Sports Media in the first MP Cup Invitational Basketball Tournament by scoring 17 points ... The New York State Athletic Commission has suspended promoter **Dino Duva** for six months and fined him $10,000 for attempting to look at the master scoresheet during the October 6 Sam Peter-Jameel McCline fight at Madison Square Garden. Duva was spotted on at least three occasions looking over the shoulders of the deputy commissioner who was tabulating the round-by-round scoring ... In an ironic twist of fate, **Anthony Burgin**, the man who was seriously hurt in a car crash caused by former IBF featherweight titleholder **Naseem Hamed**, has been charged with alleged dangerous driving in an incident that involved Hamed's wife, **Eleasha Hamed** ... Four-division former titleholder **Jeff Fenech**, 43, pleaded guilty to stealing two watches in December 2005 and was fined $750 ... Lightweight contender **Nate Campbell** was arrested by Hillborough County (Florida) sheriff's officers and charged with armed burglary of a building with assault, false imprisonment, tampering with a witness, and misdemeanor battery. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, the police report said that on September 27, the fighter punched his ex-girlfriend and forced his way into her home. When she tried to call 911 for help, he threw her on the ground and began to strangle her. When the woman kicked herself free, Campbell put a gun in his mouth and threatened suicide. The report claimed the woman suffered a contusion to her right eye and abrasions to her neck and elbow. Following a hearing, Campbell was released on his own recognizance ... Junior welterweight **Jackson Bussell**, 28, died after fighting a six-round draw with **Javier Garcia** in a bout held in Calabasas, California, on September 20. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Bussell collapsed in the ring shortly after the bout was over, and was transported to the Northridge Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead the following afternoon. "People who were there told us it appeared he was winning the fight until the sixth round, when he got staggered, but then he successfully tied the guy up, and did enough to get a draw," said Detective **Joel Price** of the Los Angeles Police Department's West Valley homicide division. "Everything seems to have been done as it was supposed to, with paramedics and ring doctors on hand at the event." Authorities are awaiting results of an autopsy, but believe the cause of death was brain damage suffered in the fight. Bussell, a member of the Klamath Tribes of Southern Oregon, was 1-1-2 (1) as a professional ... According to the *Memphis Appeal*, **Dorothy Lovell**, 42, has been charged with voluntary manslaughter in the shooting death of her husband, boxing referee **Alan Lovell**, 46. Voluntary manslaughter means that the killing was provoked, which is consistent with the fact that Mr. Lovell had been previously charged with domestic assault and aggravated assault ... Authorities in London have charged **Rene McKoy**, 19, and **Kanyanta Mulenga**, 22, with the murder of former British heavyweight champion **James Oyebola**, who was, as reported in December 2007 issue, shot in the head at close range on July 23. ■



Campbell: Out on bail

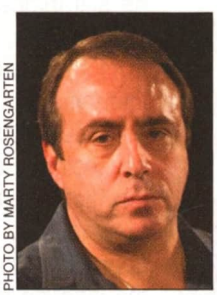


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Duva: Fined and suspended

Quotable

"I think I just gave the maid a really big tip."

—Mike Pavlik, father of middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik, upon realizing he had left his son's $665,750 paycheck in an Atlantic City hotel room

"I don't know. Every day there is a war with myself."

—Former junior welterweight champion Kostya Tszyu, commenting on whether or not he'll make a comeback

[Ratings Analysis]

"The Bible Of Boxing"

For Period Ended October 21, 2007

Heavyweights: No changes.
Cruiserweights: No changes.
Light Heavyweights: Clinton Woods (third last issue) moves to two, switching places with Antonio Tarver (second last issue).
Super Middleweights: Lucian Bute (fourth last issue) switches with Jeff Lacy (third last issue), based on beating quality opposition and Lacy's inactivity due to injury. Markus Beyer exits at five due to inactivity, which moves everyone previously ranked six through 10 up one place each. Beyer's departure also makes room for the ratings debut of Jean Pascal at 10.
Middleweights: Some major changes as Kelly Pavlik (third last issue) takes over as world champion after knocking out Jermain Taylor, who drops from world champ to three. Howard Eastman (10th last issue) leaves, replaced by Randy Griffin, who fought to a draw against fifth-ranked Felix Sturm.
Junior Middleweights: No changes.
Welterweights: No changes.
Junior Welterweights: No changes.
Lightweights: David Diaz (third last issue) moves to two, replacing Julio Diaz, who drops to three after being stopped by number-one ranked Juan Diaz.
Junior Lightweights: Marco Antonio Barrera (third last issue) exits after announcing his retirement following his decision loss to top-rated Manny Pacquiao. Barrera's departure moves everyone previously rated four through six up one slot. Vicente Mosquera (eighth last issue) exits due to inactivity, moving up Alex Arthur (ninth last issue) and Yodsanan Nanthachai (10th last issue) two places each. Mzonke Fana enters the ratings at nine and Cassius Baloyi at 10.
Featherweights: No changes.
Junior Featherweights: No changes.
Bantamweights: Joseph Agbeko debuts at eight after his upset TKO of Luis Perez (eighth last issue), who falls to 10. Genaro Garcia (10th last issue) exits to make room for Agbeko.
Junior Bantamweights: Dimitri Kirilov debuts at eight after beating Jose Navarro (eighth last issue). The loss drops Navarro to nine and Z Gorres to 10. Pramuansak Posuwan (10th last issue) exits.
Flyweights: No changes.
Junior Flyweights: Juan Carlos Reveco debuts at 10, replacing Jose Aguirre, who has lost five of his last six bouts.
Strawweights: Donnie Nietes replaces Pornsawan Kratingdaenggym at seven, thanks to Nietes' decision victory over the Thai.
Pound-for-pound: No changes.

Pound-For-Pound

1. **Floyd Mayweather**
   Welterweight
2. **Manny Pacquiao**
   Junior Lightweight
3. **Juan Manuel Marquez**
   Junior Lightweight
4. **Bernard Hopkins**
   Light Heavyweight
5. **Israel Vazquez**
   Junior Featherweight
6. **Winky Wright**
   Middleweight
7. **Rafael Marquez**
   Junior Featherweight
8. **Joe Calzaghe**
   Super Middleweight
9. **Ricky Hatton**
   Junior Welterweight
10. **Miguel Cotto**
    Welterweight

For weekly updated Ring ratings, go to
TheRing-online.com

The Ring Ratings

For Period Ended October 21, 2007

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by The Ring are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between The Ring's number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

The Ring Ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board, with the participation of The Ring Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world. To see the complete list of our panelists, click on "Ratings" at thering-online.com

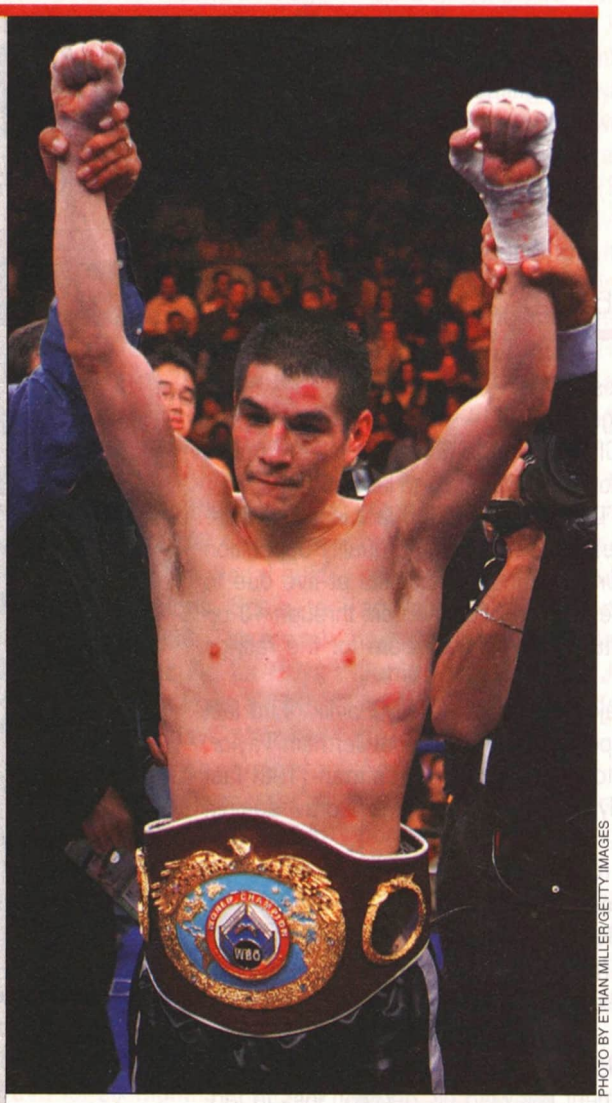


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Steven Luevano maintains his position at featherweight

Heavyweights
Weight Unlimited

Champ: Vacant

1. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO** Ukraine 49-3 (44)
2. **SAMUEL PETER** Las Vegas, NV 29-1 (22)
3. **OLEG MASKAEV** Staten Island, NY 34-5 (26)
4. **RUSLAN CHAGAEV** Uzbekistan 23-0-1 (17)
5. **NICOLAY VALUEV** Russia 47-1 (34)
6. **SULTAN IBRAGIMOV** Russia 22-0-1 (17)
7. **SERGEI LIAKHOVICH** Belarus, 23-2 (14)
8. **CHRIS BYRD** Las Vegas, NV 40-3-1 (21)
9. **VLADIMIR VIRCHIS** Ukraine 23-1 (19)
10. **TONY THOMPSON** Washington, D.C. 31-1 (19)

Jr. Middleweights
Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **CORY SPINKS** St. Louis, MO 36-4 (11)
2. **ROMAN KARMAZIN** Russia 35-2-1 (22)
3. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA** Los Angeles, CA 38-5 (30)
4. **VERNON FORREST** Atlanta, GA 39-2 (28)
5. **SERGEI DZINZIRUK** Germany 34-0 (22)
6. **KASSIM OUMA** W. Palm Beach, FL 25-3-1 (15)
7. **JOACHIM ALCINE** Canada 29-0 (18)
8. **TRAVIS SIMMS** Norwalk, CT 25-1 (19)
9. **IKE QUARTEY** Ghana 37-4-1 (31)
10. **VERNO PHILLIPS** Aurora, CO 41-10-1 (21)

Featherweights
Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **CHRIS JOHN** Indonesia 40-0-1 (21)
2. **INJIN CHI** South Korea 31-3-1 (18)
3. **ROBERT GUERRERO** Gilroy, CA 20-1-1 (13)
4. **HIROYUKI ENOKI** Japan 27-0-1 (19)
5. **JORGE SOLIS** Mexico 32-1-2 (23)
6. **NAOKI MATSUDA** Japan 27-7-3 (10)
7. **MARTIN HONORIO** Mexico 24-3-1 (12)
8. **STEVEN LUEVANO** La Puente, CA 34-1 (15)
9. **JORGE LINARES** Venezuela 24-0 (15)
10. **NICKY COOK** England 27-1(15)

Jr. Featherweights
Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: ISRAEL VAZQUEZ Mexico 42-4 (31)

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 37-4 (33)
2. **CELESTINO CABALLERO** Panama 27-2 (18)
3. **DANIEL PONCE DE LEON** Mexico 33-1 (30)
4. **SOMSAK SITHCHATCHAWAL** Thailand 53-2-1 (43)
5. **STEVE MOLITOR** Canada 24-0 (10)
6. **SERGIO MANUEL MEDINA** Argentina 29-1 (17)
7. **TAKALANI NDLOVU** South Africa 27-4 (17)
8. **POONSAWAT KRATINGAENGGYM** Thailand 30-1 (20)
9. **KIKO MARTINEZ** Spain 17-0 (14)
10. **REY BAUTISTA** Philippines 23-1(18)

Bantamweights
Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **HOZUMI HASEGAWA** Japan 22-2 (7)
2. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM** Thailand 58-3-2 (42)
3. **WLADIMIR SIDORENKO** Ukraine 20-0-2 (7)
4. **SILENCE MABUZA** South Africa 20-2 (16)
5. **GERRY PENALOSA** Philippines 52-6-2 (35)
6. **JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico 34-6 (29)
7. **RICARDO CORDOBA** Panama 31-1-2 (20)
8. **JOSEPH AGBEKO** Ghana 25-1 (22)
9. **SIMONE MALUDROTTU** Italy 25-1 (10)
10. **LUIS PEREZ** Nicaragua 25-2 (16)

Cruiserweights

Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: JEAN-MARC MORMECK
France 33-3 (22)

1. **O'NEIL BELL**
Atlanta, GA 26-2-1 (24)
2. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
Philadelphia, PA 20-1 (10)
3. **KRZYSZTOF WLODARCZYK**
Poland 38-2 (28)
4. **DAVID HAYE**
England 19-1 (18)
5. **ENZO MACCARINELLI**
Wales 27-1 (20)
6. **FIRAT ARSLAN**
Germany 27-3-1 (18)
7. **MARCO HUCK**
Germany 19-0 (13)
8. **VADIM TOKAREV**
Russia 24-1-1 (17)
9. **DARNELL WILSON**
Tacoma Park, MD 22-5-3 (19)
10. **JOHNATHON BANKS**
Detroit, MI 17-0 (13)

Light Heavyweights

Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: BERNARD HOPKINS
Philadelphia, PA 48-4-1 (32)

1. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
Hungary 27-0 (17)
2. **CLINTON WOODS**
England 41-3-1 (24)
3. **ANTONIO TARVER**
Orlando, FL 25-4 (18)
4. **GLEN JOHNSON**
Miami, FL 46-11-2 (31)
5. **CHAD DAWSON**
New Haven, CT 25-0 (17)
6. **PAUL BRIGGS**
Australia 26-3 (18)
7. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
Huntington Beach, CA 41-4 (25)
8. **HUGO GARAY**
Argentina 29-2 (16)
9. **ADRIAN DIACONU**
Canada 24-0 (15)
10. **STIPE DREWS**
Croatia 32-1 (13)

Super Middleweights

Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: JOE CALZAGHE
Wales 43-0 (32)

1. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
Denmark 39-0 (29)
2. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
Australia 29-3 (22)
3. **LUCIAN BUTE**
Canada 21-0 (17)
4. **JEFF LACY**
St. Petersburg, FL 22-1 (17)
5. **LIBRADO ANDRADE**
Mexico 26-1 (20)
6. **CARL FROCH**
England 21-0 (17)
7. **ALLAN GREEN**
Tulsa, OK 25-1 (18)
8. **DENIS INKIN**
Germany 31-0 (24)
9. **SAKIO BIKA**
Australia 23-3-2 (14)
10. **JEAN PASCAL**
Canada 19-0 (14)

Middleweights

Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: KELLY PAVLIK
Youngstown, OH 32-0 (29)

1. **WINKY WRIGHT**
St. Petersburg, FL 51-4-1 (25)
2. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
Germany 24-0 (19)
3. **JERMAIN TAYLOR**
Little Rock, AK 27-1-1 (17)
4. **EDISON MIRANDA**
Colombia 28-2 (24)
5. **FELIX STURM**
Germany 28-2-1 (12)
6. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO**
Spain 61-7 (41)
7. **SEBASTIAN SYLVESTER**
Germany 26-2 (12)
8. **AMIN ASIKAINEN**
Finland 22-1 (15)
9. **MARIANO CARRERA**
Argentina 31-4 (22)
10. **RANDY GRIFFIN**
Louisville, KY 24-1-3 (12)

Welterweights

Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: FLOYD MAYWEATHER
Grand Rapids, MI 38-0 (24)

1. **MIGUEL COTTO**
Puerto Rico 30-0 (25)
2. **PAUL WILLIAMS**
Augusta, GA 33-0 (24)
3. **SHANE MOSLEY**
Pomona, CA 44-4 (37)
4. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
Mexico 34-5 (24)
5. **ZAB JUDAH**
Brooklyn, NY 35-5 (25)
6. **KERMIT CINTRON**
Reading, PA 28-1 (26)
7. **LUIS COLLAZO**
Queens, NY 27-3 (13)
8. **JOSHUA CLOTTEY**
Bronx, NY 32-2 (19)
9. **OKTAY URKAL**
Germany 38-4 (12)
10. **JACKSON BONSU**
Belgium 25-1 (22)

Jr. Welterweights

Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: RICKY HATTON
England 43-0 (31)

1. **JUNIOR WITTER**
England 36-1-2 (21)
2. **PAUL MALIGNAGGI**
Brooklyn, NY 23-1 (5)
3. **GAVIN REES**
Wales 27-0 (13)
4. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
Brooklyn, NY 28-3-1 (18)
5. **SOULEYMANE M'BAYE**
France 35-2-1 (20)
6. **JOSE LUIS CASTILLO**
Mexico 55-8-1 (47)
7. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
Australia 45-9-1 (30)
8. **JUAN LAZCANO**
El Paso, TX 37-4-1 (27)
9. **DEMETRIUS HOPKINS**
Philadelphia, PA 27-0-1 (11)
10. **RICARDO TORRES**
Colombia, 32-1 (28)

Lightweights

Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: JOEL CASAMAYOR
Miami, FL 34-3-1 (21)

1. **JUAN DIAZ**
Houston, TX 33-0 (17)
2. **DAVID DIAZ**
Chicago, IL 33-1-1 (17)
3. **JULIO DIAZ**
Coachella, CA 34-4 (25))
4. **NATE CAMPBELL**
Jacksonville, FL 31-5-1 (25)
5. **MICHAEL KATSIDIS**
Australia 23-0 (20)
6. **ALMAZBEK RAIYMKULOV**
Las Vegas, NV 25-1-1 (14)
7. **ZAHIR RAHEEM**
Las Vegas, NV 28-2 (16)
8. **JOSE SANTA CRUZ**
Mexico 25-2 (14)
9. **YURI ROMANOV**
Belarus 19-2 (13)
10. **ANTHONY PETERSON**
Washington, DC 24-0 (17)

Jr. Lightweights

Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines 45-3-2 (35)
2. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico 47-3-1 (35)
3. **JOAN GUZMAN**
Dominican Republic 27-0 (17)
4. **EDWIN VALERO**
Venezuela 22-0 (22)
5. **HUMBERTO SOTO**
Mexico 43-5-2 (27)
6. **JORGE BARRIOS**
Argentina 47-3-1 (34)
7. **ALEX ARTHUR**
Scotland 25-1 (19)
8. **YODSANAN NANTHACHAI**
Thailand 50-3-1 (39)
9. **MZONKE FANA**
South Africa 27-3 (10)
10. **CASSIUS BALOYI**
South Africa 33-3-1 (18)

Jr. Bantamweights

Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
Mexico 32-2 (17)
2. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
Venezuela 31-2 (27)
3. **NOBUO NASHIRO**
Japan 9-1 (5)
4. **CRISTIAN MIJARES**
Mexico 33-3-2 (14)
5. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
Mexico 35-2-1 (26)
6. **JORGE ARCE**
Mexico 47-4-1 (36)
7. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
Japan 32-6 (21)
8. **DIMITRI KIRILOV**
Russia 29-3 (9)
9. **JOSE NAVARRO**
Los Angeles, CA 26-3 (12)
10. **Z GORRES**
Philippines 27-2-1 (15)

Flyweights

Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **NONITO DONAIRE**
San Leandro, CA 18-1 (11)
2. **DAISUKE NAITO**
Japan 32-2-2 (20)
3. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
Thailand 65-3 (34)
4. **TAKEFUMI SAKATA**
Japan 31-4-1 (15)
5. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
Argentina 25-0-2 (16)
6. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
Australia 29-1(23)
7. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ**
Panama 24-2 (17)
8. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
France 22-2 (9)
9. **JOSE LOPEZ**
Puerto Rico 35-7-2 (29)
10. **KOKI KAMEDA**
Japan 16-0 (11)

Jr. Flyweights

Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: IVAN CALDERON
Puerto Rico 29-0 (6)

1. **ULISES SOLIS**
Mexico 25-1-2 (19)
2. **HUGO CAZARES**
Mexico 25-4-1 (19)
3. **GIOVANNI SEGURA**
Bell Gardens, CA 18-0-1 (14)
4. **EDGAR SOSA**
Mexico 29-5 (15)
5. **OMAR NINO**
Mexico 24-2-1 (10)
6. **DANIEL REYES**
Colombia 39-5-1 (30)
7. **NELSON DIEPPA**
Puerto Rico 24-4-2 (13)
8. **BRIAN VILORIA**
Waipahu, HI 19-2 (12)
9. **OMAR SALADO**
Mexico 17-0-2 (9)
10. **JUAN CARLOS REVECO**
Argentina 17-0 (8)

Strawweights

Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **YUTAKA NIIDA**
Japan 22-1-3 (8)
2. **FLORANTE CONDES**
Philippines 22-3-1 (20)
3. **EAGLE KYOWA**
Japan 18-1 (6)
4. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
Indonesia 61-6-5 (31)
5. **KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA**
Japan 18-3 (7)
6. **ERIBERTO GEJON**
Philippines 23-2-1 (13)
7. **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines 22-1-3 (13)
8. **OLEYDONG SITHSAMERCHAI**
Thailand 23-0 (8)
9. **RODEL MAYOL**
Philippines 23-2 (18)
10. **OMAR SOTO**
Puerto Rico 12-1-1 (6)

By Jeff Ryan

Nightmare Scenario

Such is the state of the heavyweight division that Samuel Peter could suffer three knockdowns and nearly get stopped by a 37-year-old with seven career losses, yet still retain his status as the second-best big man in the world. That's because Peter did manage to survive Jameel McCline's bombs, even capture a unanimous decision, and then leave the ring with a paper title belt wrapped around his waist. In today's heavyweight division, where the standards have been lowered farther than a gangsta rapper's pants, that qualifies as a sign of hope.

Obviously the adage, "As the heavyweights go, so goes boxing," is more overdue for retirement than Evander Holyfield. If those words were still true, the fight game would be going the way of roller derby rather than producing matchups like Floyd Mayweather-Ricky Hatton and Joe Calzaghe-Mikkel Kessler, featuring a popular reality television show, and boasting a nice blend of superstars (Bernard Hopkins, Manny Pacquiao), shining stars (Miguel Cotto, Juan Manuel Marquez), and rising stars (Kelly Pavlik, Paul Williams). Thank heaven for littler guys.

The heavyweight ranks are, well, just plain rank. We thought it was bad when Trevor Berbick, Greg Page, Tim Witherspoon, Tony Tubbs, Tony Tucker, Pinklon Thomas, Bonecrusher Smith, and the rest of the Mediocrity Mafia controlled the weight class in the 1980s like a crime syndicate that had muscled its way onto the loading docks. But at least that parity party came to an end when a vicious puncher with a vicious attitude (Brooklyn kid by the name of Tyson) arrived on the scene to straighten everybody out.

The problem right now is that there's no such assassin/bouncer/garbage collector around to fix this current mess. Wladimir Klitschko is generally regarded as the best big man, but he's already been kayoed three times and had to get off the floor to beat Peter, who, of course, was almost put to sleep by McCline. That Chris Byrd, who hasn't looked impressive against a good opponent in at least two years, still resides in THE RING's top 10 says something. And it's sure not something positive.

The rest of the top 10 reads like the roster of the old Soviet Red Army hockey team: Maskaev, Chagaev, Valuev, Virchus, Liakhovich, and Ibragimov. Trying to tell one of these guys from the other is really starting to Pissmeoff. What's far worse than that lineup, though, are the names we know all too well. The 45-year-old Holyfield, who isn't even remotely considering retirement even though he was struggling with the likes of John Ruiz as far back as 2000, is in a unique position. If Hillary Clinton were to ever win the presidential election in 2008, Holyfield would have the distinction of being

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

McCline had Peter's pajamas on, but couldn't put him to sleep

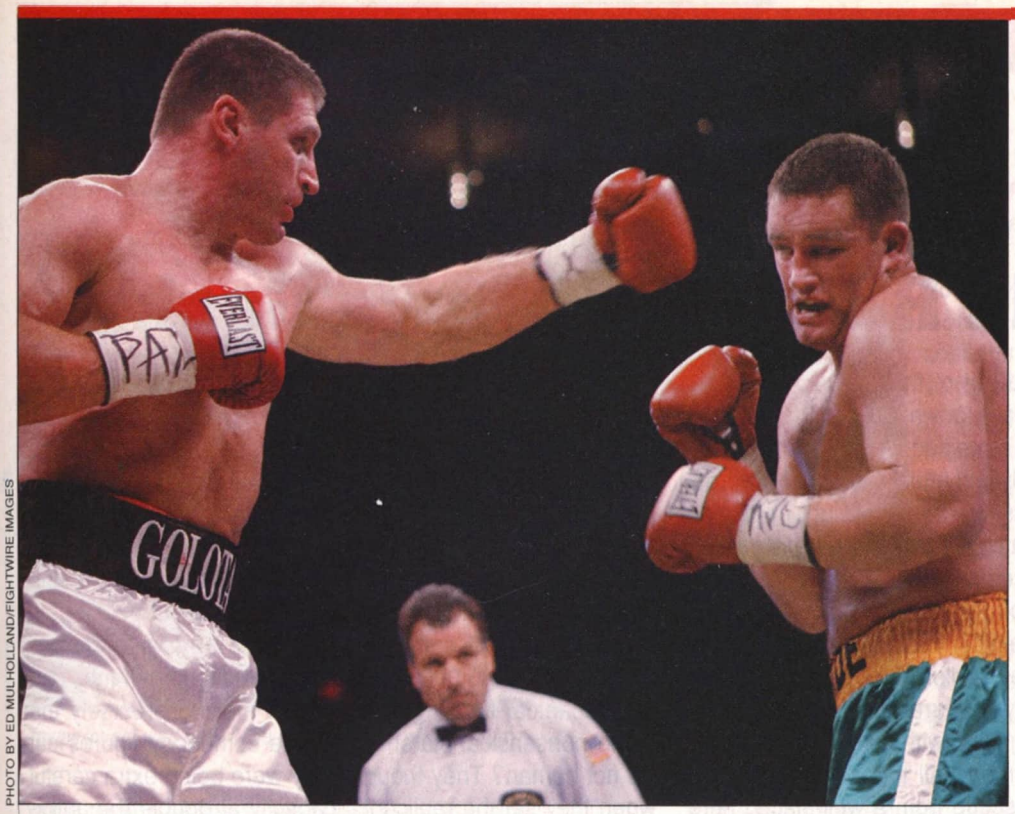


PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Yet another sign of the Apocalypse: Golota's back!

washed-up in two different Clinton administrations.

Speaking of Ruiz, he's back and campaigning for a bout with Valuev. Oliver McCall is punching away at 42 and thus far avoiding any in-the-ring nervous breakdowns. (Sorry, that's hitting below the belt—which reminds me that old buddy Andrew Golota fought on the Peter-McCline undercard.) Vitali Klitschko would have been officially unretired by now if he hadn't injured his back. Joe Mesi, he of the two subdural hematomas and subsequent suspension, is also fighting again. Heck, it's like the zombies coming to life in *Night Of The Living Dead*.

Here's the part that's difficult for me to understand: At a time when the athletes in just about every sport are stronger, faster, and, arguably, better than their predecessors, how can today's heavyweights appear so inferior to the legions that came before them? Not just inferior to a Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier, and Larry Holmes, but failing to measure up to even a Ken Norton, Earnie Shavers, Ron Lyle, Jimmy Young, or Jerry Quarry.

If he chooses to, today's heavyweight can train on computerized exercise equipment, guzzle Gatorade, Powerade, and Accelerade, pop supplements laced with every vitamin known to man, seek the assistance of sports psychologists and nutritionists, and study more film than the entire coaching staff of the Indianapolis Colts during Super Bowl week. And yet, you won't find anyone today who can match the hand and foot speed of Muhammad Ali, the power of Joe Louis, or the stamina of Rocky Marciano. To those guys, "state-of-the-art equipment" was a heavybag whose chain didn't squeak and a "sports drink" was water from the gym tap.

One can make the case that in baseball, football, track, and cycling, a lot of the superiority of today's athlete might have something to do with performance-enhancing drugs. Well, our heavyweights can't even get that right. James Toney used steroids and all they did was make him fatter and slower than he was before he was dirty. And prior to his clash with Peter, the New York *Daily News* reported that McCline received $12,000 worth of steroids and human growth hormone between 2005 and 2006. If "Big Time" did, in fact, take that stuff, it didn't exactly turn him into a beast. Put it this way: If Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa were Toney and McCline, they'd have led the league only in fly balls that died on the warning track.

Why isn't today's big man superior to his forefather? Who knows? RING Editor-in-Chief Nigel Collins thinks it has something to do with the size of today's heavies, that they've exceeded the unwritten bulk limit at which a fighter can move smoothly and execute all of the sport's unique maneuvers. It has been suggested by others that a dearth of Grade-A trainers and a de-emphasis on defensive skills is a contributing factor. Perhaps, but how do you explain the fact that plenty of other divisions, whose talent suffers from the same limited schooling, feature future Hall of Famers?

My theory is that the heavyweight dilemma is in large part the result of boxing's decline as an important part of our society. The sport is becoming marginalized. It doesn't play primetime on ABC anymore. It doesn't dominate the headlines more than one or two nights a year. And talented behemoths would rather play football or basketball, where they can become superstars at less physical risk and with more attention from the guys splicing together the highlights at ESPN. Being All-Pro in the NFL or making the NBA All-Star team is as prestigious as it ever was. Being heavyweight champion isn't.

Which brings us back to Peter. Three knockdowns, and several knots in the windpipes of his handlers later, he was leaving Madison Square Garden in possession of the interim WBC belt. According to THE RING's championship policy, though, Peter has no more right to call himself heavyweight king than Britney Spears does. Right now, the title is vacant.

In other words, an empty throne, a headless crown, and a ruler-less kingdom. But that's exactly how it should be, for when we refer to "the heavyweight nightmare," it's not Sam Peter that we're talking about. ■

By Ivan Goldman

Holyfield Replicant Blows Gasket

At first nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Evander Holyfield was set to face down Sultan Ibragimov in Moscow, and all that remained was one final press conference. That's when Holyfield uttered the fateful words, "My goal is to become undisputed heavyweight champion of the world." Witnesses watched in horror as a steaming gray substance (later identified as battery acid) spurted out his left ear and a crystal-plated eyeball simultaneously popped out of his skull. He emitted a series of frantic, high-pitched beeping noises while handlers whisked him away.

A cameraman reportedly captured the episode in its entirety, but he disappeared along with his taped evidence. So except for persistent rumors, all this was kept pretty quiet. But here's the inside scoop from a well-placed nerd who spoke to me fearfully from his iPhone.

"It's complicated," he said, "but in layman's terms, the hand-crafted android that replaced Holyfield seven or eight years ago on the public circuit was programmed to repeat that phrase about his goal is to become, blah, blah, blah no more than 6,000 times, and when it exceeded the limit, the equipment blew a gasket. That started a whole chain of other malfunctions. I know the engineers who assembled that particular model, and they're top of the line, all of them, but they figured there's no way in hell anyone would let the machine run that same digital tape in that same zombie monotone even 3,000 times. I mean, how many times can a mechanical figure get away with making precisely the same nonsensical statement before somebody figures out it's not human? They thought they were being extra careful when they set the replicant's capacity at double the anticipated use. Cost the owner a bundle too. What are you gonna do?

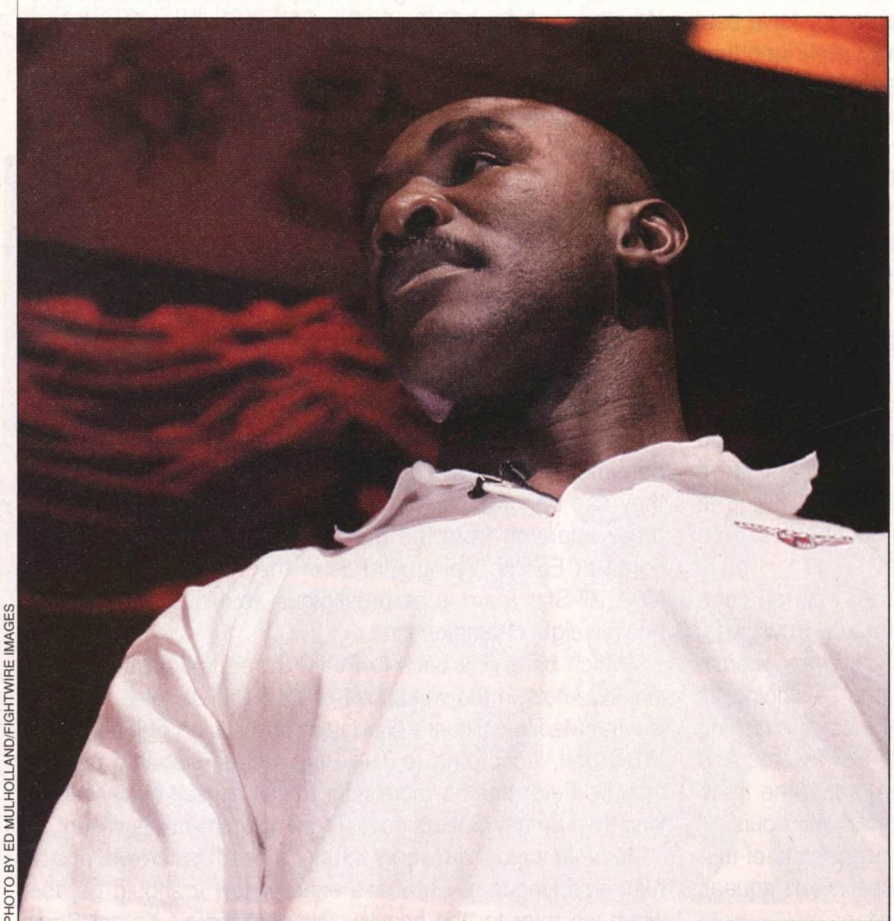


PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Real Deal or replicant?

"Now the thing needs a total overhaul—transmission, speakers, central computer system, everything. Even working round the clock, I'm not sure they'll make the deadline. They've got a couple emergency substitutes on hand, but they're the cheap stuff out of China. Look closely at the base of the neck and you can see serial numbers. But the thing is ... Uh-oh, I don't like the looks of this."

The call ended abruptly and there's been no trace of my nerd since. If any of the seven customers who purchased the pay-per-view telecast happen to read this column, will you please let me know whether you spotted those serial numbers? I'm still not sure which of the android models went in against Ibragimov. When I get the rest of the facts nailed down, I plan to do a big spread that will appear in simultaneous issues of THE RING and *Popular Mechanics*.

Evander vs. Big George (Again): Incidentally, it's the real Holyfield—the one who's been relaxing in his Atlanta mansion while his mechanized replacement goes around the

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Taylor fought well until "The Ghost" caught up with him

world reeling off the same dull sentences—who's challenging George Foreman's grill with one of his own called the Evander Holyfield Real Deal Grill. I hear it cooks a great steak but has a weird propensity to headbutt the user.

You can't actually blame Holyfield for letting some company throw money at him, but haven't you ever wondered about all these geeks who actually care which celebrity endorses which product? Clearly there are entire regiments of clueless souls who think watches, athletic shoes, beers, deodorants, cooking implements, toilet cleaners, and condoms will work better or be particularly cool if Mike Ditka or Kid Rock or some NBA star who just got out of high school sanctifies them.

All those billions paid out to secure these endorsements actually do accomplish something. They raise the price of merchandise produced by firms that must pay stiff fees to all the celebrities who put their names on stuff they probably wouldn't recognize if it fell on them. Ain't capitalism grand?

Hearns' Ghost: I expect there are plenty of fans who, like me, were delighted to see Jermain Taylor looking so spirited and downright tough in his showdown against Kelly Pavlik. In the past, I haven't been easy on Taylor and his mediocre performances, but I promise you I've derived no satisfaction from listing the failings of a basically nice guy. Now I'm pleased I don't have to. He came up short against Pavlik, but he gave it everything he had, and I hope and expect he'll have plenty of fans cheering for him in the future.

Now about that Pavlik! Why does he call himself "Ghost"? Maybe because he's the ghost of Tommy Hearns. What? You expected Hearns' ghost to be black? Tell that to Casper.

Like the Hearns of old, Pavlik worked behind a punishing jab, using it to set up a right hand from hell. Tall and lean, he looked almost out of place up there until the punches flew. That's when he showed his Tommy-ness: A working-class guy from a working-class town who seeks only the opportunity to wreck somebody. A guy you can count on to give his all, which is plenty, and leave the dancing to Fred Astaire. The only thing I can't figure is how Hearns, who's very much alive, has a ghost. I'll try to get back to you on that.

Hope For Arreola: Earlier, I'd tabbed Chris Arreola, 26, as just another heavyweight who punches hard but barely moves his head or feet and might as well be labeled pet food when he eventually moves up in class. But as he took apart well-schooled Thomas Hayes in Ontario, California, pounding him out of there in round three, I saw a more formidable Arreola on the Telefutura broadcast. He's still

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Goldman thinks Arreola is improving

learning, still improving, and—who knows?—he just might make a splash. That wouldn't be a bad thing at all. He's a bright, cheerful guy, a big, bi-lingual, American heavyweight out of Riverside, California, who comes to fight.

Against Hayes, 26-2 (18), the crowd-pleasing Arreola, 22-0 (20), actually did move his head (only in the first round, but it's a start). He also kept his gloves up and fought out of a tighter envelope. He's 6'4", weighs in around 245, and leverages his punches enough to make any opponent recalculate his future after getting tagged a time or two.

Seven of the top 10 heavyweights in THE RING's ratings hail from former Soviet republics, and an eighth, Samuel Peter, came out of Nigeria. So at this point, fans figure we're more likely to be struck by lightning than to see a formidable American heavyweight again. But before you take my advice to actually allow yourself to hope again, I must warn you that I'm also a life-long Cub fan.

Bagg-Astrous Beginning: Jim Bagg got my attention when he alleged in his first at-bat as a RING columnist that Jeff Ryan and I couldn't carry his jockstrap. I'll let Jeff speak for himself on that. As for me, I admit to being mildly disturbed by Bagg's unnatural infatuation with men's undergarments. But maybe there's some logical explanation that goes beyond the obvious interpretation. In any case, I guess there's no hard and fast rule precluding fetishists and such from doing this sort of work. And to his credit, somehow this Bagg-noramus managed to at least figure out that Bernard Hopkins was the best fighter of this era.

But judging by the first column from this remarkably self-absorbed, unobservant screwball, I'm guessing it might take a little time for the Bagg-astrophe to switch his sights from skivvies to boxing. So let's be patient with his hauntingly pathetic first efforts. And because I favor diversity in all its forms, I congratulate the editors for allowing all the no-talent trash-talkers of this world to be represented in these pages. But there's no such thing as a special-needs license that allows pompous, loudmouth gas-Baggs to foul intentionally. Too bad no one pointed that out to this one. Columnists around here—and that would include online scribe William Dettloff—disagree from time to time, but until now none of us has ever leveled a personal attack against a colleague. That doesn't mean we don't

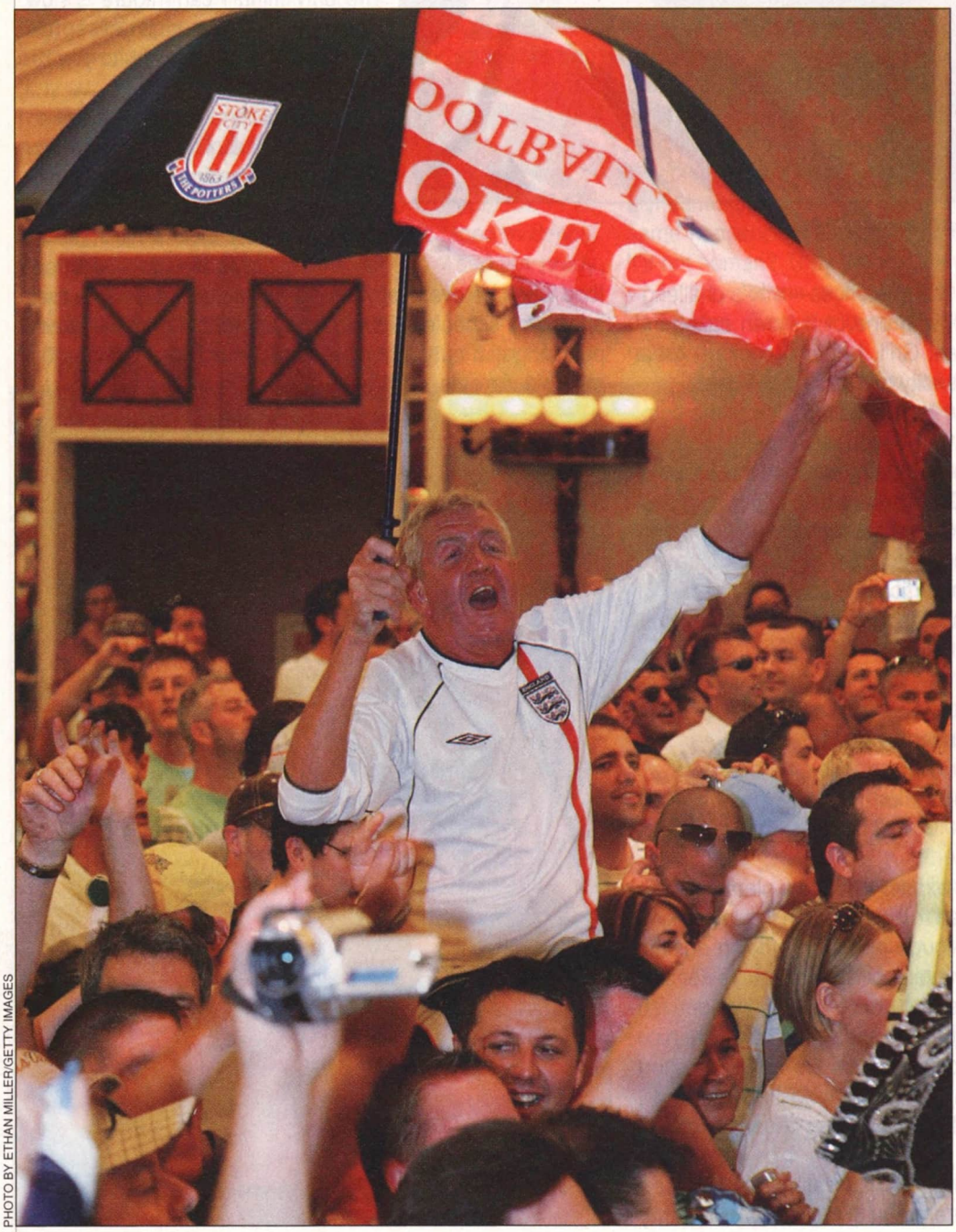


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Hatton fans have passion ... and money

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Why doesn't McCline believe in himself?

know how. Welcome to the big leagues, rookie.

Hatton Pounds: The morning tickets went on sale for Ricky Hatton-Floyd Mayweather, I got a call from a distraught friend in South Carolina who complained he'd been shoved out of the online bidding. How, he wanted to know, could so many British fans afford to buy up the tickets and fly to Las Vegas to see their beloved "Hitman"?

High finance, friends. Their enthusiasm is buttressed by a British currency that makes our shriveled dollar look like last month's cabbage. Don't be surprised if some of our British visitors look at the cost of a Vegas room and decide to buy the hotel instead.

Beastly McCline: Jameel McCline, who once dreamed of the heavyweight championship, has at last settled into his role as a speed bump to hard-driving heavyweights who might actually get somewhere. In other words, he's the new Bert Cooper, and, like Cooper, he has his moments, which he certainly had against the shocked Samuel Peter. Too bad McCline ran out of gas, but as a consolation, he spoke the best sentence of the month, even though it's not completely factual: "I'm a beast."

Magoos: On the Arreola-Hayes undercard, lightweight Robert Bey was clearly more effective than Robert Acevedo, who retreated and just didn't get as much done in their lightweight four-rounder. But judge Ray Corona weirdly scored it 59-55 for Acevedo, earning himself a Magoo. Fortunately, Marty Denkin and David Mendoza were on hand to see it respectively 59-55 and 58-56 for Bey, giving the actual winner a split decision.

And what's with judge Luis Rivera, who had Andre Berto ahead only 96-95 when he finished off brave, outgunned David Estrada in the 11th round? Estrada got something done every round, but anyone who gave Estrada more than two rounds should have, as Desi used to say to Lucy "some splainin' to do." ■

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Berto was way ahead when he stopped Estrada

Camera Clicks

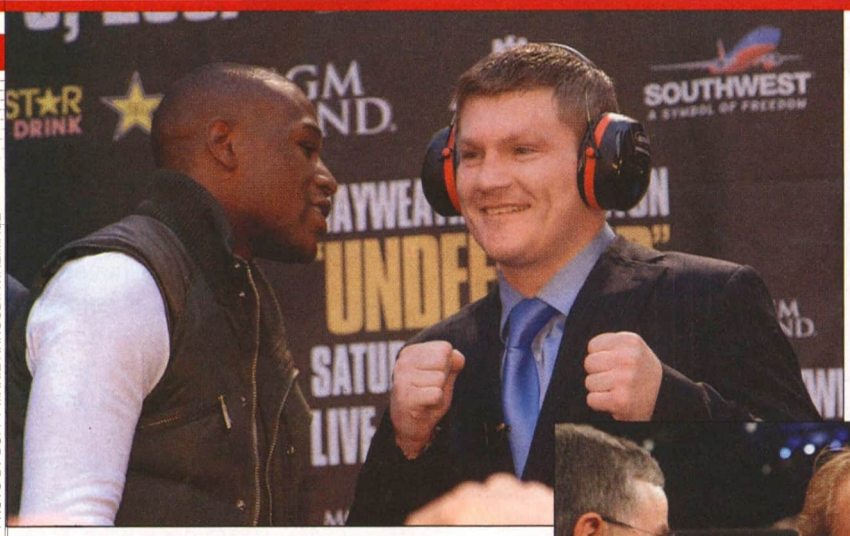


PHOTO BY DUFFY-MARIE ARNOULT/WIREIMAGE

Regardless of what happens in the ring against Floyd Mayweather, Ricky Hatton got the better of this press conference by doing the smartest thing you can possibly do when dueling on the dais with Mayweather: Drown him out with music. (Unless, of course, "The Hitman" is listening to tunes put out by Philthy Rich Records, in which case it goes into the books as a win for Mayweather.)

Immediately after Kelly Pavlik's middleweight championship victory over Jermain Taylor seemed like an odd time for Bob Arum to dance the Hora with a random man in a black suit, but hey, everybody celebrates in their own way. No truth to the rumor that after Pavlik's first successful title defense, Uncle Bob is planning to bust out the Macarena.

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

PHOTO BY SASCHA BAUMANN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Anyone else feel dirty just looking at this picture? Is it possible to write a non-pornographic caption here? This is a photo of the Klitschko brothers on the German TV show Wetten, Dass?, *which our research indicates translates as "Is That A Plunger On Your Navel Or Are You Just Happy To See Me?"*

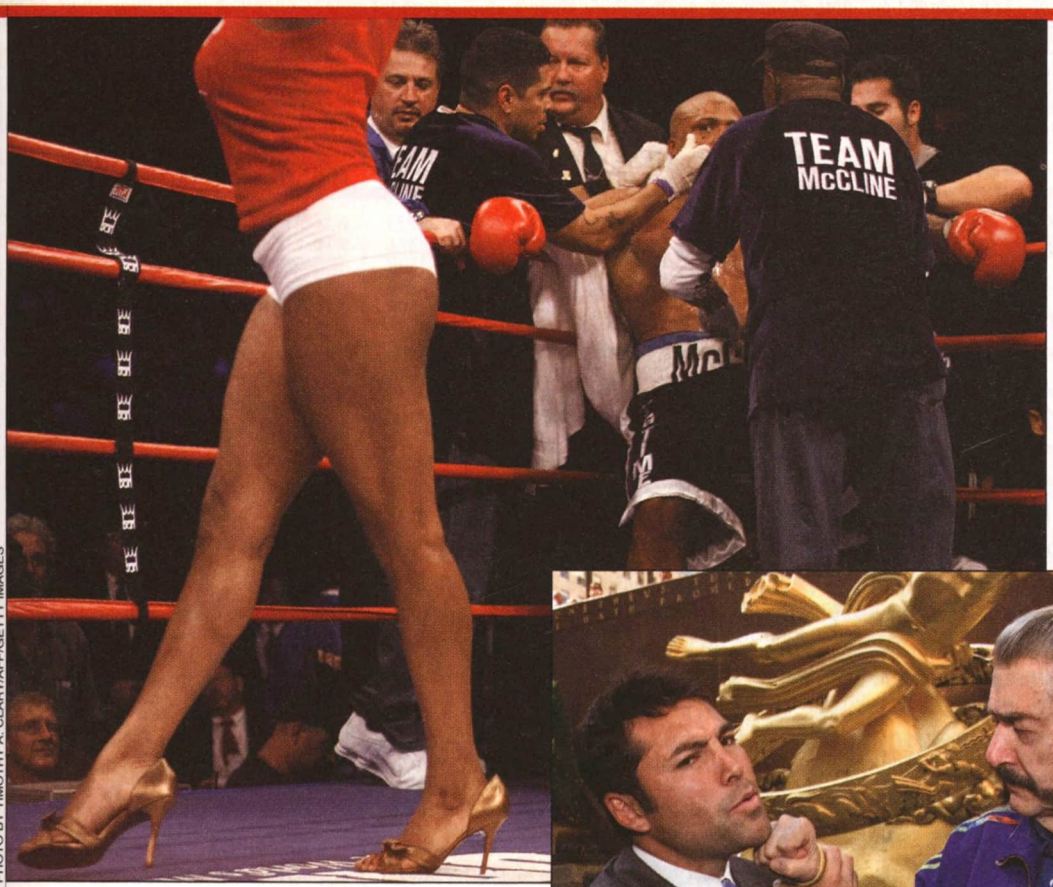


PHOTO BY TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Ladies and gentlemen, the real reason Jameel McCline blew it against Sam Peter! One second he's putting Peter on his ass, the next second he's ... well, you can see what's going on here.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Oscar De La Hoya is doing a fine job selling this staged punch from artist LeRoy Neiman with his facial expression ... but he's ruining the illusion a little bit with that hand clenched firmly around Neiman's wrist. If only he had been able to use that defensive technique when Bernard Hopkins wound up for that left hook to the body ...

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

There's no denying it: Ladies love Russian heavyweights who look like Barney Rubble. Word is Betty wasn't too happy, however, when Sultan Ibragimov received congratulations from a couple of buxom friends after decisioning Evander Holyfield in October.

By Joe Santoliquito

ARGENIS MENDEZ Junior Lightweight

Argenis Mendez would gaze with his young starry eyes as Emiliano Valdez hit the heavybag and the speedbag, or jumped rope, or worked the pads, or sparred. Everything Valdez did in the gym Mendez absorbed. Any movement Valdez made, Mendez tried to copy. The 28-year-old welterweight had a true disciple in Mendez, a combination student and fan. Mendez was just starting to box and aspired to be a professional fighter one day, aspired to be like Emiliano Valdez—his inspiration and motivation.

That all changed on January 23, 2000. Sitting in front of the TV at his home in the Dominican Republic, the 14-year-old Mendez watched in horror as Teddy Reid dismantled his hero. Valdez went into coma from the headblows sustained in the fight. Two years later, on March 20, 2002, he would die from the trauma.

Mendez says he fights today with a friendly ghost on his shoulder—the memory of Valdez. Mendez, a rangy 5'11" junior lightweight who is 8-0 (6), reminds some physically of the late Diego Corrales, while his style reminds others of former junior bantamweight contender Akeem Anifowoshe.

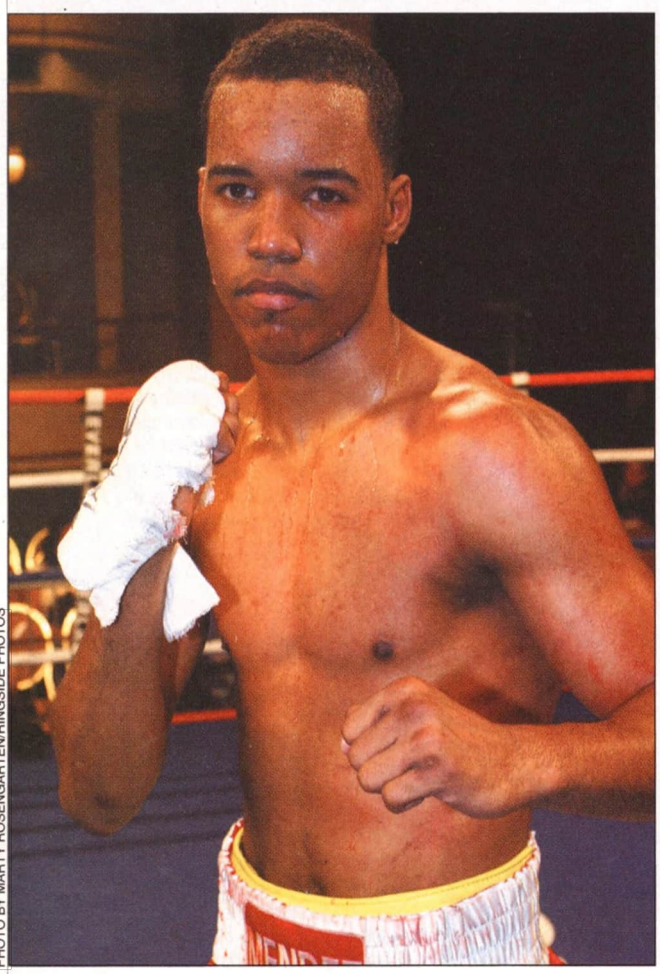


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN/RINGSIDE PHOTOS

Mendez, however, likes to pattern himself after Valdez. The way he lived and the way he trained.

"I still remember watching Valdez' fight with Reid," said Mendez, speaking through interpreter Jose Nunez, who co-manages Mendez along with Cameron Dunkin. "Valdez is the one who really inspired me when I was a kid. I always liked the way he fought. I thought when I got old enough, I'd like to fight like him one day. But when he died, I couldn't believe it. I knew him. He was like a mentor to me. I remember crying when he died. That's what motivates me today."

Nunez and Dunkin, along with promoter Top Rank, are counting on Mendez, with his smothering style and one-punch power, to accomplish more than did Valdez, whose career mark was 10-3-1 (6).

"Argenis was by no means a hidden kid, so I won't say we discovered him," said Dunkin, who first saw Mendez fight in person when he was 17 and competing at the 2003 Junior World Championships. "Once I saw him, I asked around and sent Jose Nunez after him. To me, Argenis looks like the real deal. Everyone at Top Rank loves him, and he's a very likable kid who smiles all of the time. I asked Nunez if the kid is ever unhappy; we're worried he may not have a mean streak."

"That's just the way he is," Nunez explained. "Argenis speaks softly. Someone can bump into him, and he'll keep walking, not get back in the guy's face or start anything. I think that says something about him. He has good charisma, good character. Once he puts on those gloves and steps into the ring, the devil inside of him comes out."

Mendez' aversion to outside-of-the-ring violence stems from his troubled youth. The squalor he lived in and the constant harassment he endured as a child shaped him into the person that he's become.

He was raised in a dirt-floor, cinderblock home, with a corrugated tin roof. Candles often lit the streets in the section of San Juan where Mendez lived because the electricity rarely worked. Some homes were made of plywood and crates. Children would run wild on the dirt streets, without shirts or

(Continued on Page 122)

Pro Record

2006		
Dec. 18	Jose Fonseca, Santo Domingo, D.R.	KO 2
2007		
Feb. 17	Rubin Jacoby, New York, NY	W 4
March 3	Oscar Gonzalez, San Juan, Puerto Rico	KO 1
March 17	Jose De La Rosa, Santo Domingo	KO 1
June 9	Bobby Campbell, New York, NY	KO 1
Aug. 3	Daniel Lornezano, Arcadia, FL	KO 2
Aug. 30	Martin Armenta, Houston, TX	KO 4
Sept. 16	Guadalupe Guzman, Las Vegas, NV	W 6

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DRAW	KOs
8	8	0	0	6

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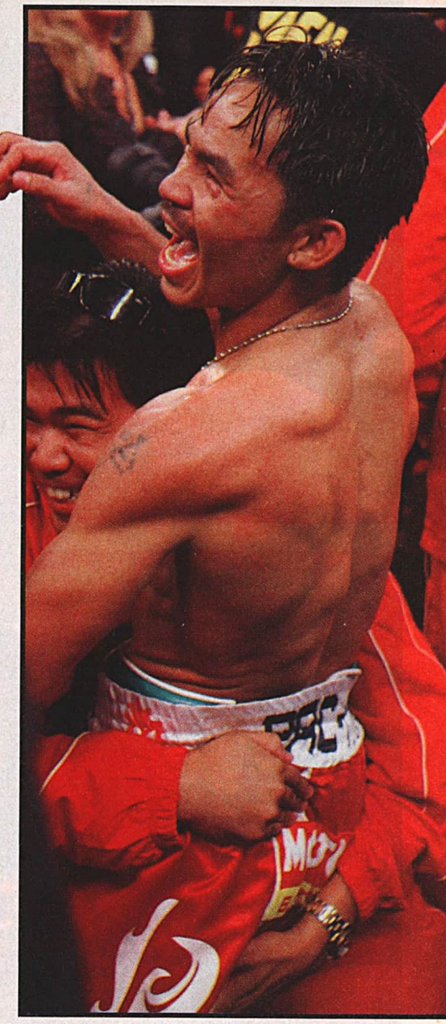
Much to the astonishment of most, Pacquiao utilized his southpaw jab and newfound boxing skills to a far greater extent than previously (below). But although the change in tactics deprived viewers of the thrills and spills normally associated with a "Pac-Man" fight, the bout ended in another victory celebration for the idol of the Philippines (opposing right).

ACHIEVEMENT vs. CONTENTMENT

Who Walked Away From Pacquiao-Barrera II The Winner?



By Nigel Collins

PHOTOS BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Despite the crescent-shaped gouge under his right eye and another loss on his Hall of Fame resume, Marco Antonio Barrera wore the look of a contented man when he arrived at the postfight press conference following his second loss to Manny Pacquiao, at the Mandalay Bay Events Center in Las Vegas. As the applause died away and Barrera took his place at the podium, a tiny voice rang loud and

The quick-fisted Pacquiao beats Barrera to the punch with a flush right to the face during bristling sixth-round action. Although the bout failed to deliver a single knockdown, there were enough sizzling exchanges to keep things interesting.

clear from the back of the room.

"Papa!"

"That's my baby," said Barrera, grinning as he peered past the heads of the assembled media to see the small, beautiful face smiling back at him.

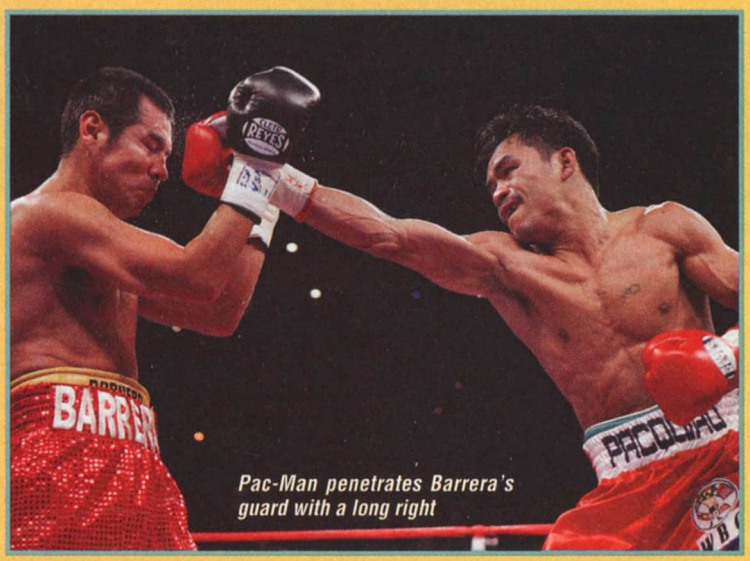
It was a brief moment of tenderness in a sport populated by hard men and violent acts, a moment that past unacknowledged except for a ripple of laughter. But it spoke to Barrera's future just as much as his insistence that we had just witnessed his "last fight." The time has come to shed the "Baby Faced Assassin" persona that carried him to the peak of his profession, and assume a full-time role as family patriarch. Unlike so many before him, it is a role that Barrera seems ready to for, both financially and emotionally.

The reported $2-million he earned for the loss certainly enhanced the former, but he was already secure in that respect. What the proud Mexican sought by fighting Pacquiao again was not so much revenge, but a measure of redemption. Four years ago in San Antonio, the Filipino handed Barrera the worst thrashing of his career. It was a demoralizing beat-down so unequivocal that tales of training camp distractions rang hollow, even as they were regurgitated to bolster the rematch.

Had Barrera suffered another humiliating flogging like the first one, it would have been impossible to segue so seamlessly into retirement. But this time he'd been competitive throughout and finished on his feet, no small accomplishment considering the man in the opposite corner. And even though victory had remained beyond Barrera's grasp, the inner satisfaction he gained by the quality of his performance will remain a personal triumph far more valuable than another digit in the victory column. There are so few happy endings in boxing; an opportu-

Not A Typical Pac Attack, But Good Enough To Retire Barrera

To a large degree, there was more excitement among the divided crowd of 10,112 at the Mandalay Bay Events Center than inside of the ring. Competing chants of "Man-eee" and "Bar-rare-ah" began to fill the air during the preliminaries. But instead of the expected explosion, Barrera and Pacquiao delivered a boxing match, which made perfect sense as far as the 33-year-old Mexican was concerned. But when it became obvious that "Pac-Man" had left his Kamikaze attack back home in General Santos City, it created a contest far less compelling than anticipated.



Pac-Man penetrates Barrera's guard with a long right

Neither man had much success penetrating the other's defense during the early going, but after three rounds of mainly thrust and parry, Pacquiao began to find his range in the fourth and connected with a handful of solid punches. Not to be outdone, Barrera unloaded three consecutive left hooks in the fifth, prompting the first decent exchange of the fight. And even though Pacquiao got the better of brisk action in the sixth, at the halfway mark, THE RING's scorecard was deadlocked at 57-57.

Although most of the remaining rounds were close, Pacquiao, 130, pulled away over the second half. He attacked behind his southpaw jab in the sixth, and although Barrera, also 130, delivered a forceful counter right, the Filipino flurried back to edge a pleasing round of two-way action. Barrera's counters continued to make things fairly interesting over the next four rounds, but there were not enough of them to compensate for Pacquiao's harder punches and busier work rate.

The 11th was by far the most exciting round of the fight. Pacquiao connected with a right to his foe's face and then delivered a booming left that staggered Barrera and buckled his knees. But Barrera, now bleeding from a gash under his left eye, quickly recovered his bearings and was gunning hard to stave off disaster when they fell into a clinch. Then, as referee Tony Weeks moved between the pair to force a break, Barrera lashed out with right hand that landed flush on the side of Pacquiao's jaw.

The cheap shot clearly did some damage, and while Weeks was lecturing the perpetrator, Pacquiao spun away and hung over the ropes. He was given brief timeout to recuperate, and the ref instructed the judges to deduct a point from Barrera's tally. It was not as flagrant a foul as when Barrera clocked Juan Manuel Marquez while he was on the floor, but blatant enough to warrant the penalty.

The final round was anticlimactic in comparison with the 11th, and the reading of the scorecards pretty much a formality. Although judge Tom Schreck's 115-112 score for Pacquiao seemed overly generous to Barrera, Jerry Roth and Glenn Trowbridge's twin tallies of 119-108 might have swayed a tad too far in the opposite direction. THE RING came down somewhere in the middle, scoring the fight for Pac-Man by a 118-111 margin. But anyway you slice it, the unanimous decision raised Pacquiao's record to 45-3-2 (34), and dropped Barrera's log to 63-5 (42).

Regardless of whether he stays at 130 pounds or moves up to 135, the Pacquiao thrill ride continues, while Barrera goes home to Mexico to await the inevitable call to Canastota.

—N.C.

nity to exit gracefully is a victory unto itself, one that Barrera seems to have embraced. Besides, had he won, the temptation to fight on would probably been irresistible.

Things are a lot more complicated for Pacquiao, who stood on the other side of the podium, his face scuffed by Barrera's blows, his once megawatt smile reduced to an occasional grin. He knows that he has many a punch to both give and receive before he finds the peaceful place that Barrera now inhabits. And while Pacquiao has retained his boyish looks in spite of all the battles he's endured, the sparkle in his eyes has been replaced by the wary look of a

The closest Pacquiao came to putting Barrera on the floor came in the 11th round, when he set his rival up with a right hand and then buckled his knees with a left. But Barrera quickly recuperated and launched a counterattack.

man who is starting to suspect that he just might be mortal after all.

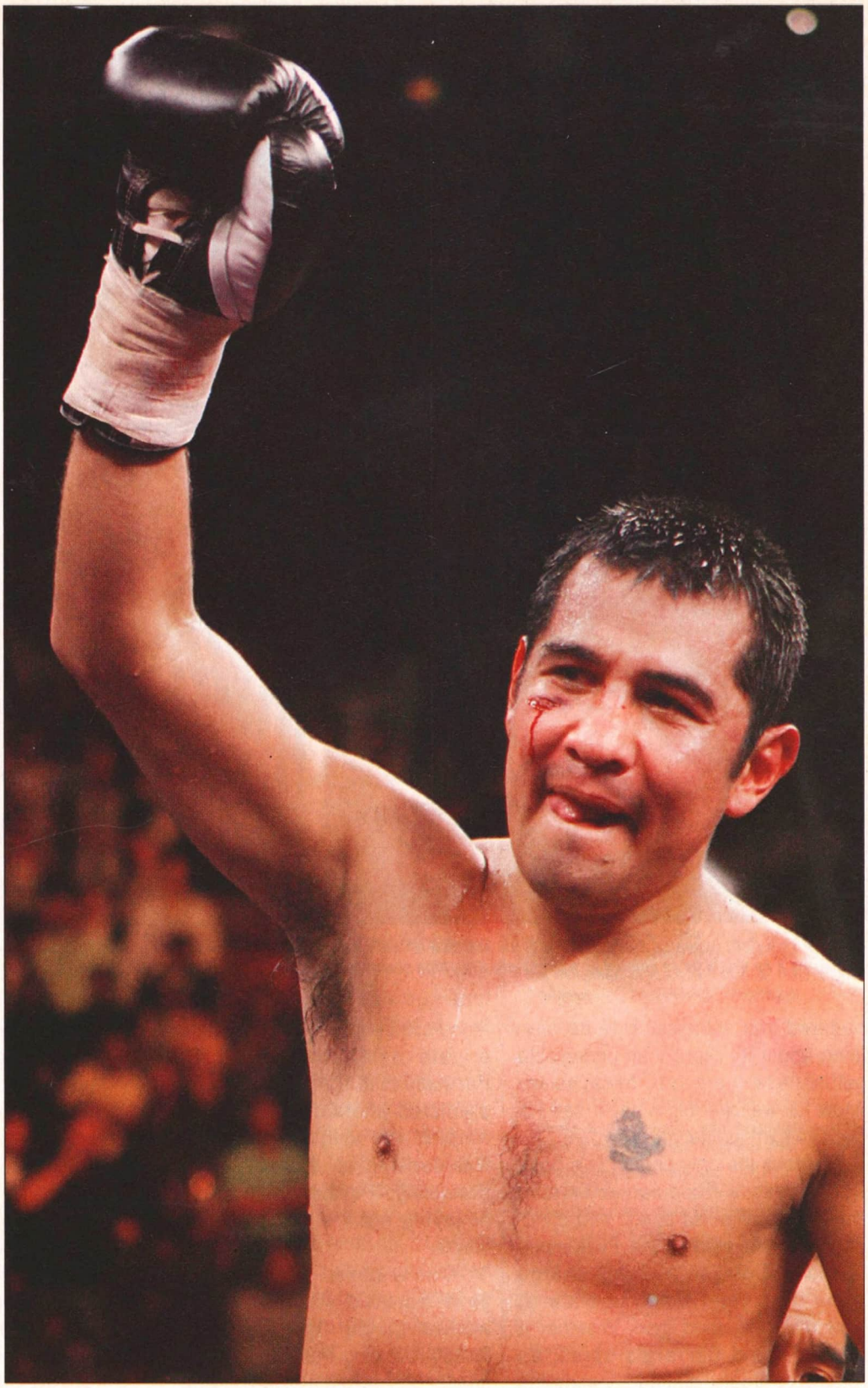
While the interception of opposite trajectories is common enough in boxing, the victor is usually on the way up. In Pacquiao's case, you have to wonder. His almost childlike enthusiasm for combat that endeared him to millions seems to be receding along with the pell-mell attack that originally carried him to glory. Despite the fact that Barrera was clearly bet-

A bloody but unbowed Barrera cracks Pacquiao with a left during the climatic 11th round. The proud Mexican hero did much better in the rematch than when they first fought in 2003, but couldn't quite match his rival's speed and firepower, and lost a unanimous decision.

ter prepared this time, the Manny Pacquiao who ravaged him in 2003 would have done likewise to the Barrera he shared the ring with on October 6.

Whether or not we've seen the last of the old "Maniacal Manny" remains an open question. It has often been noted that Pacquiao lives his life the same way he fights: pedal-to-the-metal sans seatbelts and a crash helmet. But now the lifestyle appears to be gaining on the fighter, and the dire forecasts that have been emanating from the Philippines for years may yet prove prophetic. Moreover, if the two Barrera fights constitute a valid measuring stick, it would be fair to deduce that Pacquiao's trajectory has, at the very least, flattened out, maybe even begun its descent.

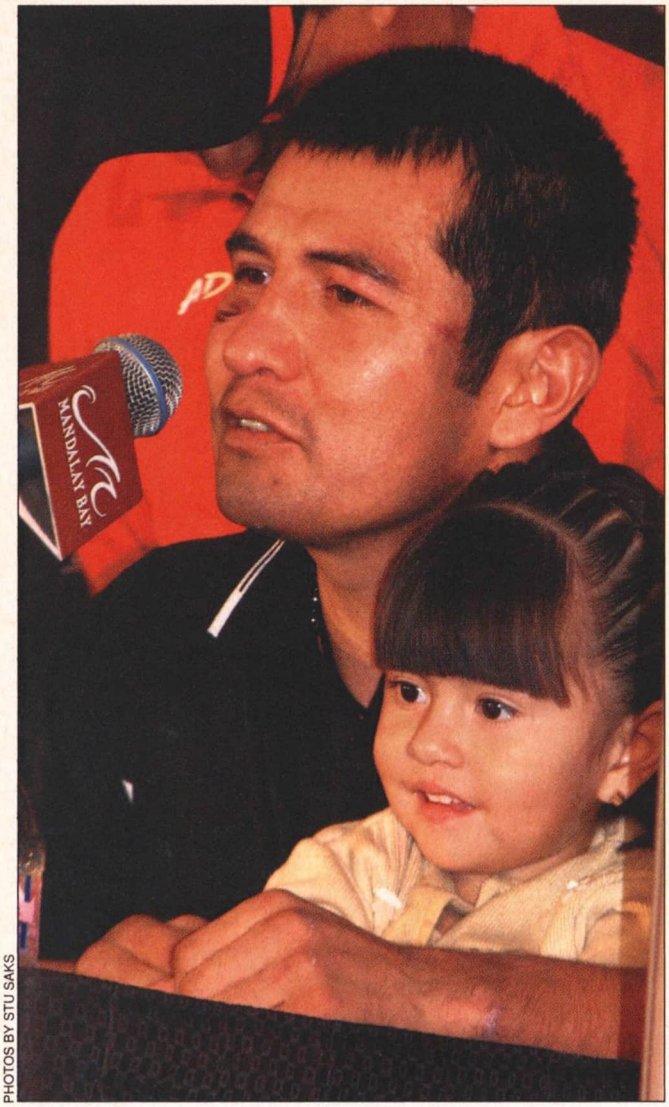
You can't separate the fighter from the man, and Pacquiao is as much a prisoner of who he is as the rest of us. But his situation is unique, even for a rich and famous prizefighter. He is, simultaneously, the idol and hope of the downtrodden masses from which he sprang and the favorite target for opportunists of every stripe. The burden of being all things to all Filipinos weighs heavily on his soul, while an ever-expanding cesspool of leeches attach themselves to his coffers.



Although Barrera did not come close to winning, his surprisingly strong showing was a moral victory if nothing else. And while he would have loved to retire on a winning note, he fought well enough to exit with his head held high.

His raging libido, coupled with his passion for gambling and alcohol, not to mention a peasant's naiveté in business matters, have made Pacquiao an easy target for those who wish to suckle at the teats of the nation's favorite cash cow.

True, Pacquiao has been an enthusiastic participant in much of this, but we who have delighted in his savage purity are still troubled by his plight, and just as helpless as the men he's



PHOTOS BY STU SAKS

Loser Barrera (left) appeared comfortable with his decision to retire, while winner Pacquiao looked more pensive than joyous (right). Perhaps he was wondering if he would be as content as Barrera when the time comes for him to hang up his gloves.

battered into submission to do anything about it. There's an undeniable selfishness there too, because we know full well we might never see his like again in our lifetime.

Perhaps the only person in a position to rescue Pacquiao is Freddie Roach, his elfin-like coach and confidant who traveled to the Philippines island of Cebu to train his charge when the fighter failed to show at Roach's Hollywood gym. Whether it was to avoid Barrera's spies, as Manny originally claimed, pacify his beleaguered wife, Jinky, or simply because it was hotter in Cebu and therefore easier to shed weight, as he later asserted, is impossible to know. Still, after a late and clamorous start, complete with a chaotic incursion of fence-climbing fans who invaded the private gym, Roach proclaimed Pacquiao fit to fight. What is more, he predicted another knockout. Afterward, it was tough to tell if Freddie was sending up a smokescreen to camouflage Pacquiao's shortcomings or laying out the blueprint for the future.

"Manny boxed well and showed good footwork, which was what we worked on during training," said Roach following Pacquiao's 12-round unanimous decision over Barrera.

Boxing and footwork! Wait a second. This isn't Willie Pep were talking about; it's Manny Pacquiao, the swashbuckling dynamo that cut a swath through four divisions, leaving the unconscious bodies of his opponents strewn in his wake. More than any other fighter today, "Pac-Man" is renowned for his unstoppable attack and ability to mow men down like blades of grass beneath the scythe. Boxing and footwork! Surely, Roach was jesting.

"Manny was fighting a smarter fight tonight," the trainer insisted. "Speed and power is not enough to stay in the game long enough. He's bringing more to the table than being ferocious."

Sadly, these innovations were not an addition to Pacquiao's ferocity, but rather a substitute, which is an entirely different matter altogether. While most great fighters undergo a successful metamorphosis as they age—Bernard Hopkins and Barrera for

example—Pacquiao is only 28, and should be peaking, not turning to boxing's version of the prevent defense. There was also talk of moving up to 135, because, as Roach admitted, "It's getting a little hard for him to make 130."

You can't really blame Roach. He's undoubtedly doing the best he can with what he's got to work with, but radically tweaking the style that took Pacquiao to the top and jumping up in weight might not be the cure. If only Manny would curtail his bacchanalian ways and focus on his craft, all would be well. But that's not likely to happen anytime soon, especially as he's still winning, not as spectacularly as in the recent past, but winning nonetheless.

Perhaps a rematch with Juan Manuel Marquez, who held Pacquiao to an electrifying draw in 2004 and who bested Barrera earlier this year, would motivate him to buckle down. Manny and Marquez are ranked first and second, respectively, at 130 pounds and obviously have unfinished business. The winner of a return bout would fill the vacancy at the top of the division and crown a new RING junior lightweight champion. Both Top Rank and Golden Boy Promotions, who co-promoted Pacquiao-Barrera II, are eager to make the fight, and HBO has given the match its stamp of approval. It is, after all, still the most attractive match in the 130-pound division—at least the most attractive that can be held in the United States.

When Barrera was asked who he thought could beat his two-time conqueror, there was no hesitation. "Edwin Valero," he quickly replied, glancing at the undefeated Venezuelan knockout artist who was standing just a few feet away when Marco passed the baton. But Valero, who has stopped every one of his 22 pro opponents, is banned from fighting in the U.S. because of a failed brain scan, the lingering aftermath of an old motorcycle accident. And despite campaigning in Japan to great acclaim, getting his boxing license reinstated in the U.S. is a remote possibility at best.

A fight with Pacquiao somewhere in Asia remains an option, but when Valero, sporting shoulder-length hair and designer eyeglasses, stepped up to the microphone and issued a challenge, Manny barely acknowledged his presence. Perhaps his mind was elsewhere, thinking about the inevitable hero's welcome that awaited his return to the Philippines. Or maybe his thoughts strayed no further than that night's victory party. There would be plenty of time to worry about his next fight in the coming months. For now he could leave the speculation to others.

It is rare indeed when the loser seems more at peace with himself than the winner, but maybe it's not too surprising in this case. Barrera's long journey is over, while Pacquiao's path stretches out before him like a minefield of his own making. Still, there's no denying that a large part of the excitement surrounding Pac-Man involves the tension created by the frenzied high-wire act that is his life. If truth were told, we wouldn't have it any other way. Without his faults, Pacquiao wouldn't be human or beloved, just a merciless robot crushing everything in his path. And where's the fun in that? The troubling part is that while we still call out for more, his joy of fighting seems to be ebbing, and Pacquiao without the bliss is just another fighter.

For now, the magic remains within Pacquiao's reach, and he may very well recapture it the next time he ducks between the ropes. But as the press conference wound down and the gathering faded into the Las Vegas night, it was hard not to notice that while Barrera was surrounded by the warm glow of family, Pacquiao was trailed by an overpopulated posse of hangers-on, all dressed in identical red tracksuits. Maybe the best we can hope for is that it crossed Manny's mind to wonder how many of them will be by his side when his turn comes to play Barrera's part in boxing's merciless cycle? ■

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A SUPERSTAR IS BORN

Pavlik Revs Up The Engine That Drives The Sport

By William Dettloff

PHOTOS BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

It was entirely fitting that when Kelly Pavlik's long road to stardom took him finally to the Atlantic City Boardwalk in late-September, the middleweight world title was his reward. Not a title from some bogus, superfluous weight class, or an "interim" belt. He was not crowned a "super" champion

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Moments after rising from a second-round knockdown, a discombobulated Pavlik stumbled away from Taylor, who tried in vain to finish the job. The challenger quickly recuperated, however, and took the fight to the champion at the start of the next round.

or even a super-duper one, though we imagine it's never too late. You can debate whether or not such silliness might have diluted the drama or precision of the moment when he stretched Jermain Taylor, but you can't deny the perfect beauty of it all happening at 160 pounds for the world championship.

While it may be true that, as is said, the heavyweight division drives the sport, it is the middleweight class that is the fight game's true engine. The fighters are more skilled and better conditioned, which (go figure) results in better fights. The purses are smaller, and so the better fighters are enticed to fight more frequently and against better opposition to make up the difference. Middleweight gave us Ketchel and Greb, Robinson and LaMotta, Cerdan, Zale and Graziano, Monzon, Hagler, and Hopkins. Its past is richer than any in the game, and the significance of that is not wasted on its new king.

"There's definitely pressure there, with the history of the division," Pavlik told THE RING a week after stopping Taylor in the seventh round of their wonderfully violent slugfest. "Especially going against the real champion in Taylor, who beat Bernard Hopkins. And look at all the guys that came out of middleweight: Hagler, Hearns, Duran, Leonard. All the great fighters. That weight class has always been that way."

You can forgive him for forgetting the old-timers and also that Leonard,

Duran, and Hearns made their bones at lighter weights before moving on to 160—Pavlik is a baby yet at just 25 years old. Besides that, he's more concerned with the present and the future than he is with the past. "Today we've got guys like Felix Sturm and Arthur Abraham. They're pretty much unknown here because they've wanted to fight over there (in Europe), but they're great fighters."

Whether or not Sturm and Abraham qualify as "great" depends on whom you ask, and in any event it is Pavlik now who is clearly the star of the division. His bruising, off-the-canvas knockout of Taylor, an increasingly unpopular champion, is seen by many as just the elixir the fight game needs as it faces competition from other combat sports. Indeed, Pavlik isn't just a heavy-handed puncher; those guys are a dime a dozen in this business. He is also tremendously popular at a regional level, as evidenced by the reported 5,000 or so fans that trekked to Atlantic City from Youngstown, Ohio, to watch him subdue Taylor. If the numbers are accurate, they account for about half of the crowd of 10,127. And they made their presence felt, nearly blowing the roof off of Boardwalk Hall when Pavlik entered the ring.

Many fighters become unnerved at that kind of pressure, especially in their first very large event. Pavlik, predictably, did not.

"I did feel some pressure from the Youngstown fans," he conceded. "But it was pressure in a good way. It was good pressure. It was amazing how they were all behind me. I just didn't want to let them down."

He almost did in the second round when Taylor's whipping right hand came over his jab and landed flush. As Pavlik dropped his hands and showboated a bit, Taylor, 27-1-1 (17), banged off a couple more rights and down the challenger went—hard.

It was the one thing Pavlik's trainer, Jack Loew, was afraid could happen. "My worst case scenario was exactly what happened in the second round," he told THE RING. "I knew if we hit Jermain Taylor with the double jab, we could land the right hand because Taylor would turn his head to get away from the second jab. But if Kelly just threw single jabs, Taylor would come over the jab with the right hand. In the second round, Kelly got lazy with the jab and Taylor came over the top, and it almost cost him."

In another state and with a less discerning referee, it almost certainly would have. Steve Smoger gave

According to trainer Jack Loew, Pavlik's left jab was the key to victory. When he doubled-up on it, Taylor was unable to counter, which gave Pavlik and opportunity to land the potent right-hand bombs that eventually ended Taylor's reign.

Taylor absorbs a face-distorting right cross from Pavlik, who punches much harder than one might think by looking at his skinny physique. But Pavlik has stopped 29 of his 32 opponents, making him one of boxing's hardest hitters and the sort of fighter the fans adore.

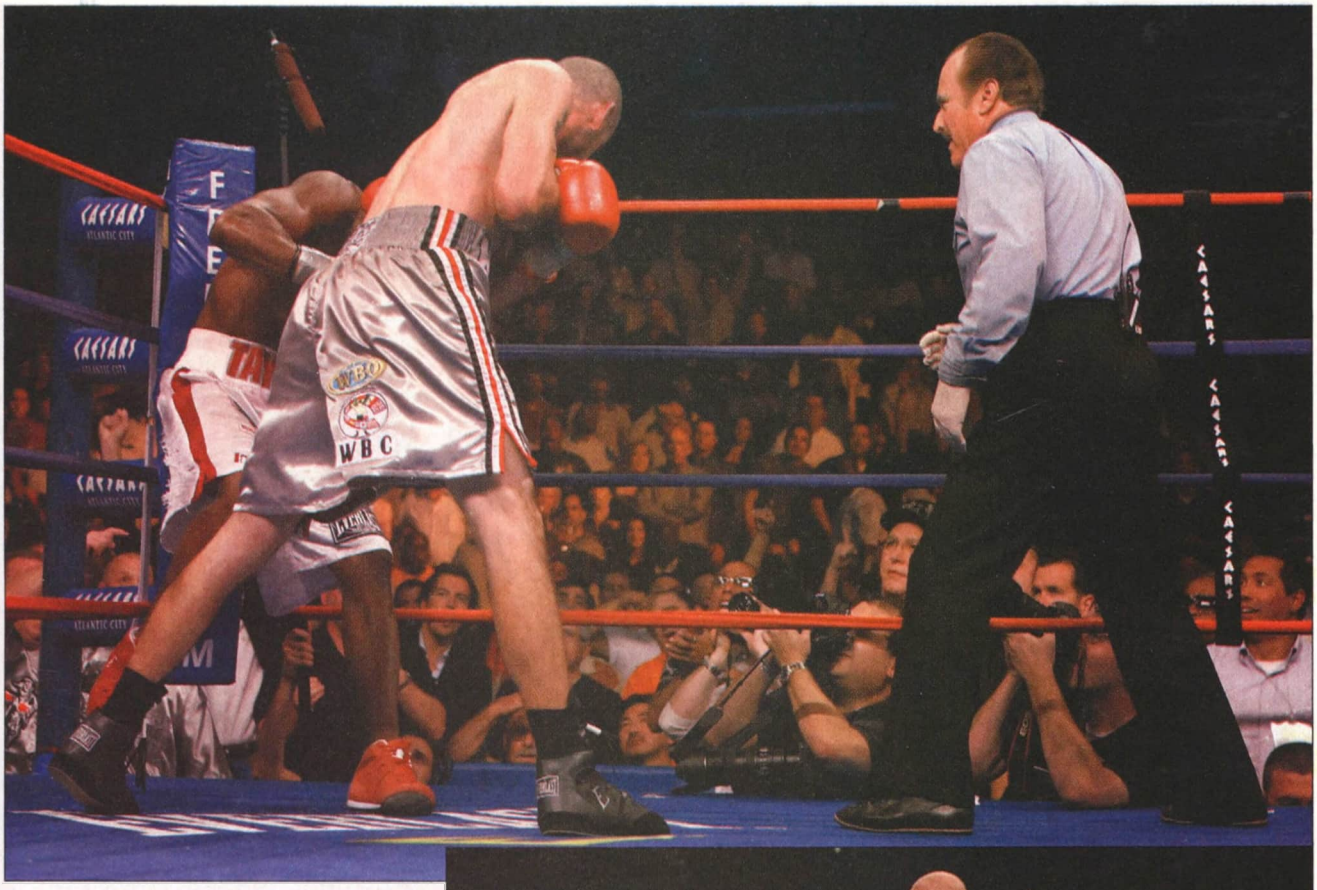
Pavlik, 32-0 (29), the benefit of the doubt, even as he stumbled around the ring while Taylor, as amateurish as ever despite the best efforts of no less a training icon than Emanuel Steward, clubbed away mostly ineffectually. That Pavlik, 159½, not only lasted the round, but also regained enough lucidity to smile sheepishly at Smoger between rounds and yell at him, "I'm good," was remarkable given how badly he was hurt and how early in the round the drubbing began. It was even more remarkable that he went right to Taylor, 159, in the third round as though nothing had happened, as though he hadn't come very close to getting stopped.

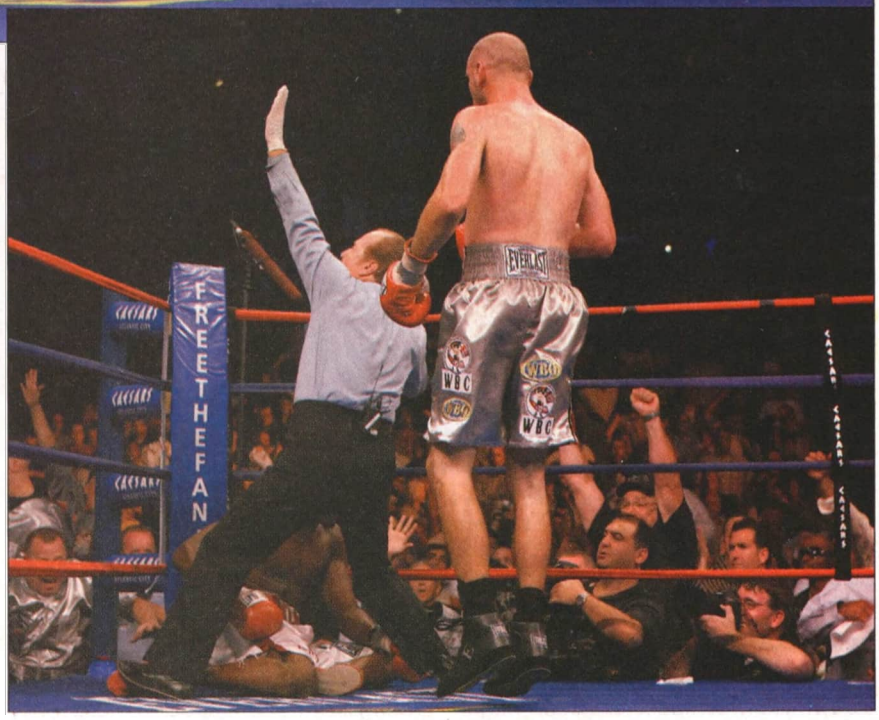
"I don't see how they could have [stopped it]," Pavlik said. "Anytime he landed anything, I grabbed and held on or threw punches back. If I just stood there and took the punch, I could see it getting stopped, but I responded every time."

By the fourth and fifth rounds, those responses were taking a toll on Taylor. Though he appeared throughout to land the sharper, quicker blows, Taylor was unraveling little by little under Pavlik's relentless pressure and thudding jabs and right hands. The straight right that ended it suddenly and conclusively in the seventh came, as Loew and Pavlik had planned, after a pair of heavy jabs. And at the moment Smoger waved his arms over a semi-conscious Taylor at the 2:14 mark, much of the fight business rejoiced. Not because of any particular animus they felt toward Taylor, necessarily, but because of the potential upside Pavlik brings to the business.

"I think he's going to be the biggest star in boxing," Bob Arum told the assembled masses afterward. "The way he fights, how he comes back when he's hurt, how articulate he is. This is the biggest blow to the UFC since this so-called competition began. This fight is going to bring all the young guys back to boxing." It's true that you would expect that from Pavlik's own promoter, and especially from Arum. But he wasn't the only one excited about what Pavlik's victory could mean for boxing.

"Pavlik's win over Taylor and the way he did it is just what boxing needs and has needed for quite some time," said Philadelphia-based, Hall of Fame





In the seventh round, Pavlik hammered Taylor into the ropes (above), where he battered him to the canvas and forced referee Steve Smoger to stop the fight (right). The victory set off a wild celebration among the approximately 5,000 Pavlik fans that journeyed to Atlantic City to support their hero.

promoter J Russell Peltz. "This was boxing at its best, the kind of action and drama I fell in love with as a kid. I was pumped and I had no business interest in either guy. I just looked forward to a really good fight, regardless of the outcome. That was the least I expected."

Peltz was particularly impressed with the atmosphere at Boardwalk Hall. "When was the last time you saw a crowd that was just so 'up' before, during, and after? It was like a college football rally, or like the way the British do it overseas, and here too, for Ricky Hatton."

The celebration in Atlantic City was nothing compared to the treatment Pavlik received in Youngstown. On the night of the fight, 5,000 night-shift workers at a local General Motors plant were given the night off so they could watch the fight on HBO. Delivery of the local paper was delayed so it could provide late coverage of the fight. And in early-October, the town threw a parade for the fighter that attracted, according to local sources, thousands of spectators and celebrants.

Much has been written and said about Pavlik's hometown and its status among a growing number of American blue-collar cities whose better days are long gone, and which seem ill-equipped and ill-suited for the future. The bottom dropped out of Youngstown, once a thriving, vigorous steel town in the center of the Rust Belt, in the 1970s when steel companies sent their production business overseas. Today, 25 percent of its population lives below the poverty line. There is

Delighted promoter Bob Arum embraces Pavlik following his crushing kayo of Taylor to capture the world middleweight title. Arum said he believes Pavlik is "going to be the biggest star in boxing."

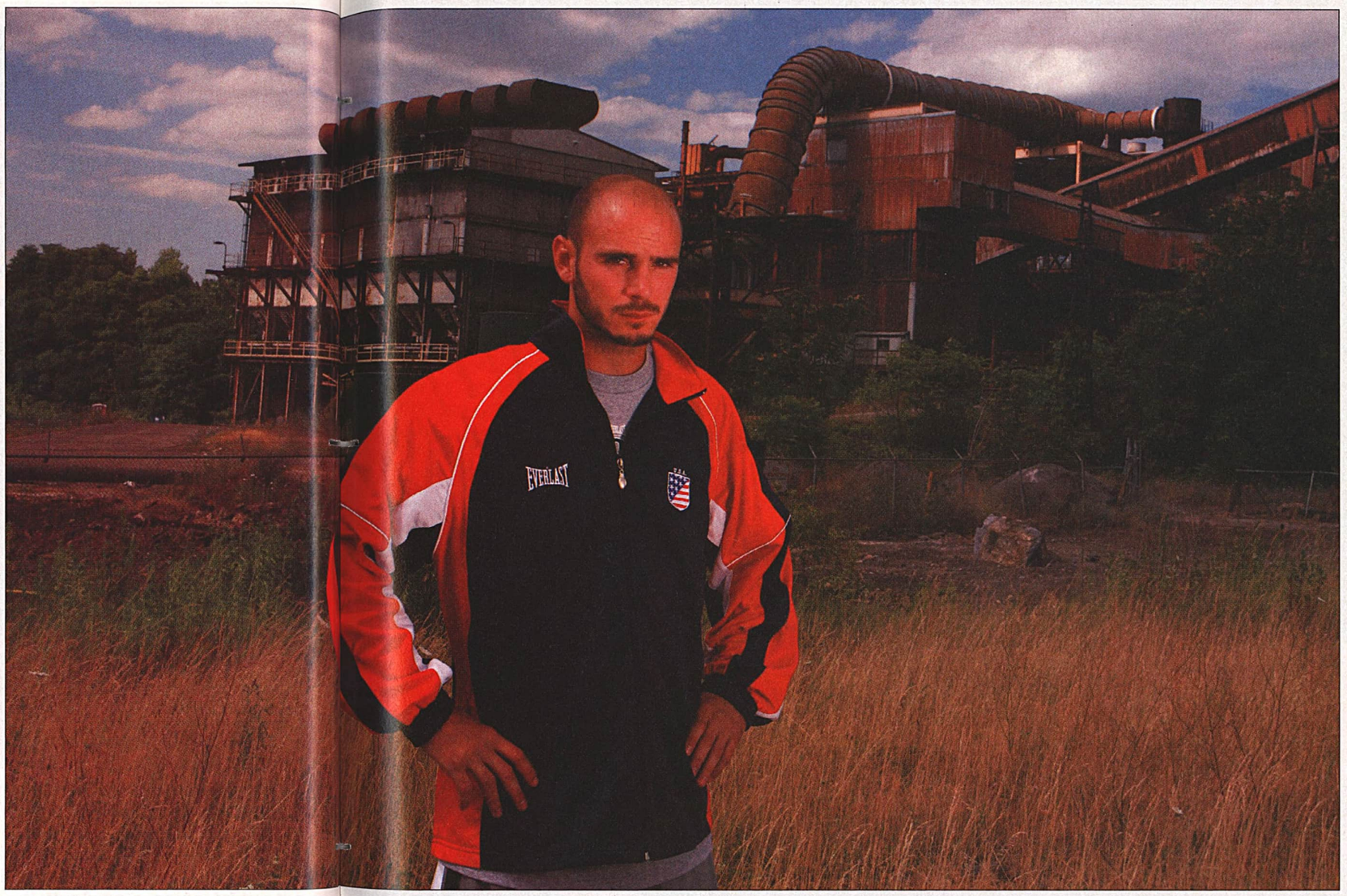
little reason to expect that number will decrease appreciably in the near future. But they do have Kelly Pavlik.

"I've lived here all my life," said Loew. "Kelly's impact has been huge. It's brought life back into this town. Job-wise it's tough here. Everyone is proud of our athletics, and we've done well. But not like what Kelly has done. You should have seen the parade we had for him out here. It was hugely uplifting. I went out shopping with my wife a little while ago, and I got stopped about 25 times."

HBO's Jim Lampley, who called Pavlik's fights against Edison Miranda and Taylor, sees Pavlik's popularity growing well past the boundaries of Youngstown. "His appeal is manifest in the sense that he is an everyman," Lampley observed. "He looks like the UPS delivery guy. So people will identify with that throughout his career. In that sense and in his background, coming from an old steel town, he is a throwback fighter. Also, there will be a chronic tendency to underestimate him because of his appearance; he's a skinny, balding white guy, so people will see him frequently as an underdog. And he likes that. He enjoys that. He'll use it."

Lampley is impressed with Pavlik's deep well of confidence, a quality most observers note upon meeting him for the first time, and his ring intelligence. "I knew there was something different about him when I met him before the Edison Miranda fight," Lampley said. "I was stunned at his calm, at his confidence, and his self-contained quality. It was clear that none of the spouting Miranda did about him and about Taylor had any effect on him at all.

"He has an almost architectural vision about what's going to happen in a fight. He will tell you what he can do and what he can't and what his opponent will try to do. And there's no bluster about it. He has a very sophisticated understanding of what he can do in the ring and how fighters match up. You just don't talk to many fighters who have the kind of understanding that he does."



Rust Belt hero: Pavlik poses in front of the deserted Brier Hillworks Steel Mill in his hometown of Youngstown, Ohio. Like many former steel towns across the United States, Youngstown has fallen on tough economic times, but Pavlik's success has given the entire city a huge emotional boost.

Lampley's right. It is odd for a fighter, who, as a kid, knew about fellow Youngstown champions Harry Arroyo and Ray Mancini, but didn't really look up to any fighters as heroes, though he did watch a lot of Rocky Marciano on tape and Sugar Ray Leonard. It is an odd thing about a fighter who, when he came into the gym as a skinny little kid, Loew recalls, "was nothing special talent-wise, but was the ballsiest little kid you ever saw. All heart and balls. He just wanted to spar all the time. It didn't matter how many times he got beat up and got a bloody nose, he always wanted to keep sparring."

It is difficult to envision Pavlik getting beaten up again anytime soon, especially if, as rumor has it, his first title defense comes against John Duddy in Madison Square Garden, a blockbuster of a matchup that Peltz says he would "move heaven and earth to make." After that, presumably, would come a rematch with Taylor, which was built into their contract and which would occur at 166 pounds. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Pavlik has only just won the title and has a lot riding on his back—the ghosts of the middleweight champions that went before him, the dreams and sorrows of his friends in Youngstown, the hopes of the fight game fraternity and, most heavily, his own ambitions.

"It hasn't really set in yet," he said. "The main thing is I'm not done yet. I still have a lot to prove." Let the proving begin. ■

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

The Pugilistic Power Poll:

BOXING'S 10 BIGGEST PUNCHERS

By Eric Raskin

To the squeamish, the knockout is the worst thing about boxing. Separating a man from his senses, rattling his jaw or his ribs or his brain so violently that he can no longer function—to those too weak-stomached to appreciate the sport, it's a horrifying sight. But to those of us who love boxing, it's beautiful. It's the art of pugilism in its most perfect application. It's one of the foremost reasons why we watch. When it comes to selling tickets and drawing television ratings, knockout power can make up for a whole lot of other shortcomings.

Succeeding in the squared circle, of course, is about so much more than punching hard. It's about footwork and defense and ring generalship, among other things. But listing boxing's best in terms of footwork, defense, or ring generalship just wouldn't be that much fun. Listing boxing's biggest punchers is.

So here are our choices for the current 10 best, the guys who, in a pound-for-pound sense, hit the hardest and do the most damage. Some of them are on the all-around pound-for-pound list too; others are highly flawed and will never be regarded as the best in their respective divisions. But what they all have in common is the crushing power to end a fight suddenly. And, not coincidentally, all of them are fighters we want to watch.

Vazquez fires a right during Marquez rematch

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

10 Israel Vazquez
42-2 (31)

Kayo Percentage: 67%

Why He's Rated Here: The junior featherweight champ didn't go the distance until his 17th pro fight, and has only gone the distance once in his last 10, proving that whether facing weak fodder or championship-caliber foes, he's consistently destructive. Vazquez isn't a one-punch kayo artist, and he doesn't score the spectacular, beyond-a-doubt whackouts that could have propelled him higher on the list, but he has in recent fights knocked down some of the best in the business and forced stoppages. He dropped Rafael Marquez in both of their fights (KO 6, KO by 7), came from way behind to power past Jhonny Gonzalez (KO 10), dropped Oscar Larios before winning on a cut (KO 3), and blew out previously undefeated Art Simonyan (KO 5). "El Magnifico's" knockouts are a testament to hard work in the gym and determination in the ring—plus a natural punching ability that has led to 17 knockouts in the first three rounds.

Best Knockout: It's a bout few have seen because it happened when both fighters were still unknowns, but Vazquez' first-round blastout of Larios in 1997 in the first of their three fights holds up as the most impressive of his career. It was an all-out brawl for two minutes, until Vazquez exploded with a vicious combination. The final punch was a right to the chin, stiffening "Chololo" and leaving him flat on his back.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: Armando Guerrero is the only fighter to go the distance with Vazquez in the last five years, and the journeyman nearly pulled off the upset. Vazquez trailed badly at the halfway point, but staged a rally to take the decision.

9 David Haye
19-1 (18)

Kayo Percentage: 90%

Why He's Rated Here: One look at the record—19 wins, 18 by kayo—should give you a fairly good idea. But a closer examination *really* drives home the point that the British cruiserweight can bomb with the best of them, as he has eight first-round knockouts, four second-rounders, two that ended in the third round, and two more that ended in the fourth. That makes 16 of his 20 fights—80 percent—that Haye won inside four rounds. And yes, many of the opponents have been stiffs (that's why we're reluctant to rank Haye higher than this). But not former titlist Arthur Williams, who almost always goes

Haye unloads on Giacobbe Fragomeni

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

rounds and couldn't last three with Haye; not Glen Kelly, the one-time Roy Jones victim who went seven rounds with the then-pound-for-pound king and only two with Haye; not Alexander Gurov, the Ukrainian veteran who went eight rounds against Jean-Marc Mormeck and couldn't handle 45 seconds with Haye. The European cruiserweight titlist, who will have challenged Mormeck for the world title by the time you read this, is a relentlessly aggressive powerhouse, boasting a bodybuilder's physique and a classic kayo artist's leverage (he stands 6'3"). He may have issues with stamina and defense. But his punch will never be what holds him back.

Best Knockout: The Gurov blowout is tempting, but we lean toward his April '07 destruction of Tomasz Bonin, a 37-1 (20) heavyweight from Poland with a 14-pound weight advantage over the blown-up Haye. It took 1 minute, 45 seconds for Haye to serve notice that when he's done being a cruiserweight, the heavyweights ought to be nervous.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: In July '06, Haye hit Ismail Abdoul with every punch in his arsenal and won all 12 rounds on all three cards, but he couldn't put the ultra-tough Belgian, who's only been stopped once among his 13 losses, on the canvas.

8 Darnell Wilson
22-5-3 (19)

Kayo Percentage: 63%

Why He's Rated Here: Looking at his knockout rate—the lowest on this list—you might think we put Wilson on here just as an excuse to say "Ding-A-Ling Man" a few times. But the numbers don't tell the whole story with the D.C.-area cruiserweight. What he *is* is not what he *was*. From August '05 to June '06, the struggling clubfighter lost four straight. Then he suddenly turned a corner, started reaching his potential, and began showing the world his prodigious power. Nobody in boxing has put together a more impressive string of knockouts in the past year than Wilson, who dusted in succession contenders Daniel Judah (KO 4), Dale Brown (KO 2), Kelvin Davis (KO 3), and Emmanuel Nwodo (KO 11). Ding-A-Ling is built like a middle linebacker, with seemingly the maximum amount of muscle you can pack onto a 5'10" frame, and he loves to just get in close and bomb away. He's always been an *exciting* slugger, but now he's turned into a *world-class* slugger, and a threat to any 200-pounder he hits on the chin.

Best Knockout: It's hard to top the "Oh my God" factor of the left hook that iced Nwodo in the 11th round of a close fight. It took until about the 50th time we saw it replayed before we stopped cringing.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: When you have five losses and three draws, obviously there are a few opponents who fit into this category. Among opponents Wilson was able to defeat, the real thorn in his kayo percentage was Darren Whitley, a tough, sub-.500 New England fighter who lasted the distance with Wilson twice in '03, first in a six-rounder and then in an eight-rounder.

"Ding-A-Ling Man" rings Nwodo's bell

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

1 Vic Darchinyan
29-1 (23)

Kayo Percentage: 79%

Why He's Rated Here: "The Raging Bull" is somewhat of a one-handed puncher—but what a one hand it is. His southpaw left cross bludgeons opponents as if his flyweight body has one middleweight limb. Surprisingly, the Armenian/Australian has only one first-round knockout on his record, but he's accrued stoppages in nearly every other possible round, lacking only a ninth-rounder and a 10th-rounder in his pursuit of having all 12 on his resume. Darchinyan didn't go the distance once in his 31-month alphabet title reign, winning the strap from Irene Pacheco (KO 11), and then stopping his first four challengers. His fifth defense came against Glenn Donaire, and Darchinyan dominated him before settling for a highly unsatisfying six-round technical decision win. Next came a 12th-round kayo of Victor Burgos that put the challenger in a coma, furthering Darchinyan's fearsomely heavy-handed reputation. And though his seventh defense ended in disaster when Nonito Donaire (Glenn's brother) starched Darchinyan in the fifth round, it wasn't because Darchinyan lacked power. He just couldn't land many of his home-run lefts against his quicker, more technically sound foe.

Best Knockout: Darchinyan is the only man in Diosdado Gabi's 34 fights to knock the capable Filipino out, and it was a sensational shot. It was a left cross—naturally—that collided with Gabi's skull in the eighth, snapping his head sideways almost to the point of bouncing off his own left shoulder as he collapsed to the floor.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: Only one fighter has gone the distance with Darchinyan since his fourth pro fight, and when veteran Alejandro Montiel became that fighter in '03, he paid a price to do so. Darchinyan won the 10-rounder by insanely lopsided scores of 100-88, 100-84, and 100-83.

6 Kermit Cintron
28-1 (26)

Kayo Percentage: 90%

Why He's Rated Here: Now that he's training with Emanuel Steward and wearing the gold Kronk Gym trunks, it's hard not to be reminded of Tommy Hearns—maybe not in terms of the overall package, but certainly in terms of the kayo power. Cintron hits viciously with both hands, and he can end fights in a variety of situations: He can blow opponents out early (seven

THE NEXT 10 ...

These are the punchers worthy of honorable mention (in alphabetical order):

Arthur Abraham, 24-0 (19)
Started 14-0 (14); going the distance more now, but kayo of Khoren Gevor in last fight was sensational

Jorge Arce, 47-4-1 (36)
Knockout percentage would be even better if not for so many decisions early in career

O'Neil Bell, 26-2-1 (24)
Great late power, with eight stoppages in the eighth round or later

PHOTO BY MARTIN ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

Abraham tears into Gevor

Alejandro Berrio, 26-4 (25)
All four losses by kayo; either you get him outta there, or he's going to get *you* outta there

Miguel Cotto, 30-0 (25)
A brutal grind-you-down type, and arguably boxing's hardest body-puncher

Rafael Marquez, 37-4 (33)
Was top 10 as a bantamweight, but punches seem slightly less potent at junior feather

Edison Miranda, 28-2 (24)
Seventeen first-round knockouts, plus he's the only man to kayo Howard Eastman

Samuel Peter, 29-1 (22)
Would have made the top 10 two years ago, but five of last six have gone distance

Giovanni Segura, 18-0-1 (14)
Young 108-pounder has eight one-round victims, including previously un-kayoed vet Daniel Reyes

Ricardo Torres, 32-1 (28)
Not quite as powerful as the numbers suggest; now facing world-class foes, only two kayos in last five

—E.R.

Darchinyan has Burgos in serious trouble

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

first-round knockouts, seven second-rounders); he can rally to win fights in which he's getting completely outboxed (KO 5 Said Ouali); he can pound a quality opponent round after round until he caves (KO 8 Teddy Reid); or his power can prove the difference in a punishing, back-and-forth war (KO 10 David Estrada). The 28-year-old Puerto Rico-born bruiser has made a real weapon out of his jab under Steward's tutelage, and it sets up his powershots beautifully. He really has it all as a puncher—but he isn't ranked higher because he hasn't proven his greatness as a kayo artist against championship-caliber opponents. Reid and Estrada are probably still the best opponents he's beaten, and the one time Cintron tested himself at the next level, against Antonio Margarito, he flopped.

Best Knockout: In his most recent fight, Cintron scored a second-round devastation of Walter Matthysse, who went 10 rounds and was never off his feet in his only other loss, against Paul Williams. The broad-shouldered blaster has had his share of highlight-reel kayos in his career, but none has been as picturesque as the combo that nearly decapitated poor Matthysse.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: He could hardly land a noteworthy punch against Margarito, much less knock him out. Cintron had a good opening round, and then gradually unraveled until he was dismissed in the fifth. It suggested that when a good puncher hits back, Cintron doesn't respond well, a serious criticism for him to disprove as he continues his comeback.

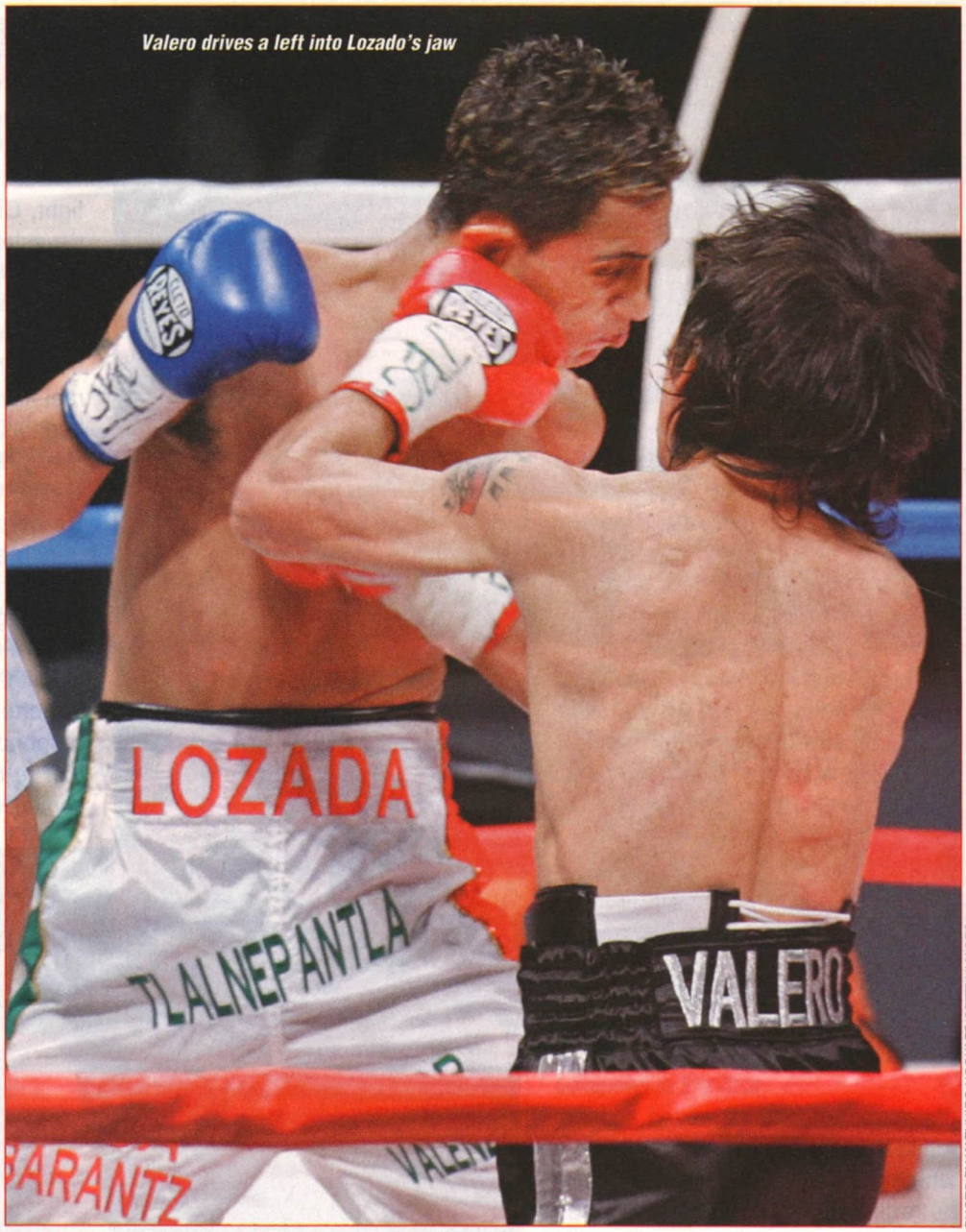
Cintron overpowers Matthysse

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

5 Edwin Valero
22-0 (22)

Kayo Percentage: 100%

Why He's Rated Here: Twenty-two fights, 22 wins, 22 knockouts—19 of them in the first round. Need we say more? Actually, we do need to, because with numbers like that, it takes a little explanation to understand why the Venezuelan isn't ranked number one. The answer is in the opposition (or lack thereof). Valero has faced one RING-rated opponent, Vicente Mosquera, and Mosquera took the young southpaw into the 10th round of a competitive fight, raising questions about how perfect his knockout rate would be if he'd faced a few more live opponents. Still, against the modest opposition he's met, you can't ask for more than what "El Inca" has done. A skilled boxer who's fallen in love with his own power and chooses not to use much science, Valero can devastate with both his right hook and his Pacquiao-like straight left. After 39 rounds as a pro, the only ones he's lost were two or three against Mosquera. Most of the rest ended in kayos, and those that didn't were still dominated by the all-offense phenom.



Valero drives a left into Lozado's jaw

PHOTO BY KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Best Knockout: Though it's tempting to pick his 20-second wipeout of Aram Ramazyan or his 72-second icing of Michael Lozada in his first alphabet title defense, his February '06 kayo of Whyber Garcia stands out most to us because of the decent quality of the opposition and the drama of the finish. Garcia was 17-3 and had gone the 12-round distance with Valdemir Pereira a year earlier, but Valero found a way to run his first-round knockout streak to 18 against him, ending it with just three seconds to go in the opener.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: So far, there hasn't been one. You could say his sturdiest opposition has come from American commissioners, who won't license him to fight in the States because of a negative brain scan in 2004.

4 Kelly Pavlik
32-0 (29)

Kayo Percentage: 91%

Why He's Rated Here: Prior to his September 29 fight with Jermain Taylor that made him middleweight champion of the world, Pavlik might have come in a couple of spots lower, as he, somewhat like Valero and Cintron below him, had proven himself a devastating puncher against D-level, then C-level, then B-level opposition, but hadn't yet gone A-level. A seventh-round kayo against Taylor, Pavlik's power ultimately carrying him to victory despite inferior speed and a near-disastrous second round, proved that "The Ghost" should indeed be feared by even the very best. Twenty-one of his 29 knockouts have come in the first three rounds, and Taylor joins an impressive list of fighters whose only kayo losses came at Pavlik's heavy hands: Edison Miranda (KO 7), Jose Luis Zertuche (KO 8), Bronco McKart (KO 6), and Fulgencio Zuniga (KO 9). Somewhat like George Foreman, Pavlik doesn't always look like he's throwing forceful shots, but the

Pavlik rocks Taylor with a right

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

bodies just keep piling up anyway. At 6'2" and 160 pounds, Pavlik has that classic puncher's build, with long arms and lean muscles producing maximum leverage. It remains to be seen whether he has the classic puncher's chin (in other words, not much of one). But he clearly has the heart to give his power time to prevail.

Best Knockout: It's hard to argue with coming off the deck to do what he did to Taylor. Two right hands started it, and two uppercuts and a left hook in the corner finished it.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: Trialhorse Anthony Ivory had 66 losses on his record when he fought Pavlik, but only three came by knockout. Against Pavlik, the grizzled vet flashed his tremendous chin again, lasting the eight-round distance.

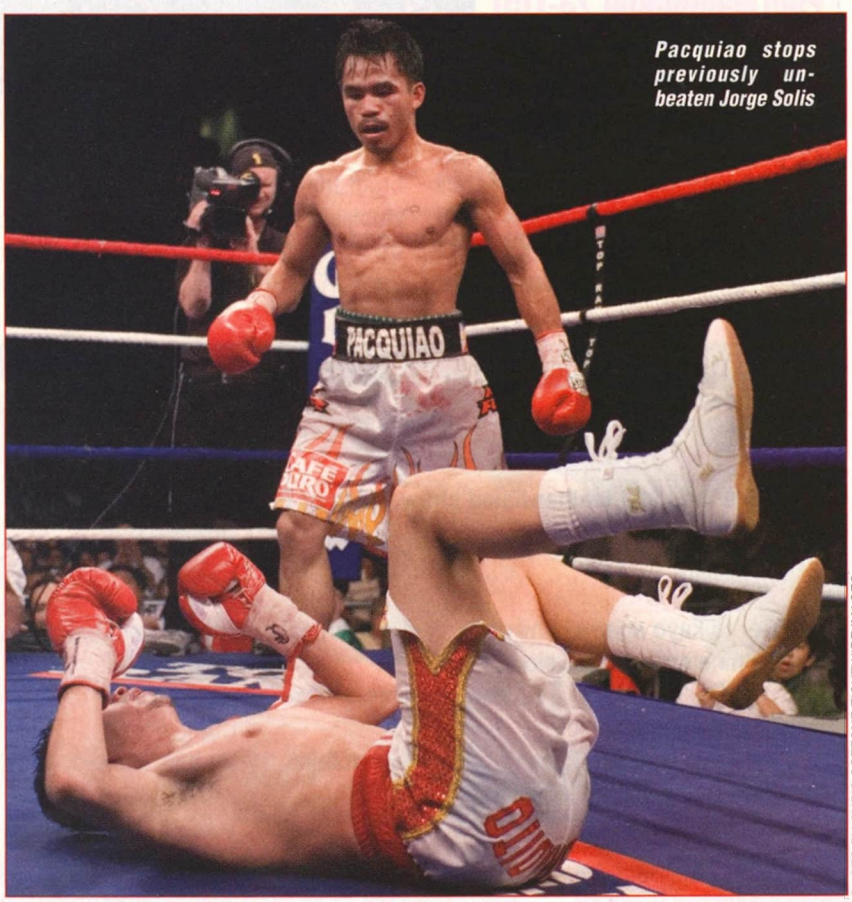
3 Manny Pacquiao
45-3-2 (35)

Kayo Percentage: 70%

Why He's Rated Here: It's not the numbers with Pacquiao, who has the third-lowest knockout percentage on this list. It's against whom those numbers have been accumulated. Pacquiao has more knockouts against pound-for-pound-level competition than any other active fighter, having dusted Erik Morales twice and Marco Antonio Barrera—not to mention stoppage wins over former titlists Jorge Eliecer Julio, Lehlo Ledwaba, and Chatchai Sasakul. And don't forget, he had Juan Manuel Marquez on the canvas three times. Pac-Man went the distance in five of his first seven fights; that's why his knockout percentage is in the 70s rather than the 80s or 90s. He obviously was a different fighter then (when he was all of 17 years old). But now he's the most explosive offensive fighter in the game. His southpaw straight left hand may be the sport's single best punch, traveling from Pacquiao's hip to his opponent's jaw with startling speed. And he never stops coming. Perhaps most incredibly, he turned pro at junior flyweight, moved up from flyweight to junior feather to feather to junior light, and, unlike nearly every fighter in history—even most of the great ones—he's retained his power every step of the way.

Best Knockout: The first Barrera fight may have been his most complete performance, but the first Morales fight was his most meaningful knockout, because (a) Morales had already beaten him once, and (b) "El Terrible" had never been close to a kayo loss previously. That was the fight in which Pacquiao first started mixing in a body attack, and it all added up to more than Morales could take.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: Pac-Man came ridiculously close to knocking out Marquez in May '04, but



Pacquiao stops previously unbeaten Jorge Solis

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

WHO NEEDS PUNCHING POWER?

Here are 10 active fighters proving that you can be successful in the fight game even if you don't hit very hard (in alphabetical order):

Chris Byrd, 40-3-1 (21)

Super middle beefed up and became an undersized heavyweight titlist using speed and defense

Ivan Calderon, 29-0 (6)

Other than Floyd Mayweather, junior fly champ may be the best pure boxer in the game

Hozumi Hasegawa, 22-2 (7)

Southpaw bantam titlist hasn't gone less than seven rounds since 2002

Eagle Kyowa, 18-1 (6)

Thai strawweight has changed name three times, but can't change inability to punch

Paul Malignaggi, 23-1 (5)

Just two kayos in 21 fights since 3-0 (3) start; so slick he pushed Miguel Cotto without any pop

PHOTO BY TORU YAMANAKA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Hasegawa flattens Genaro Garcia's face

Sergio Mora, 19-0-1 (4)

Fighting five-rounders on *The Contender* didn't help an already weak kayo percentage

Jose Navarro, 26-3 (12)

2000 Olympian knocks out most weaker foes, but always goes 12 against decent fighters

Yutaka Niida, 22-1-3 (8)

Who's the most feather-fisted straw, Niida or Eagle? Has only one kayo in last 11 fights

Wladimir Sidorenko, 20-0-2 (7)

Prior to kayo against unworthy challenger in last fight, bantam belthold-er won nine straight decisions

Cory Spinks, 36-4 (11)

Last kayo win: 2001; can't punch and doesn't try to, just flicks speedy love taps and uses his legs

—E.R.

just couldn't finish the job. Marquez brilliantly adjusted to Pacquiao's speed after a three-knockdown first round, and didn't just find a way to survive; he found a way to pull even and salvage an unforgettable 12-round draw.

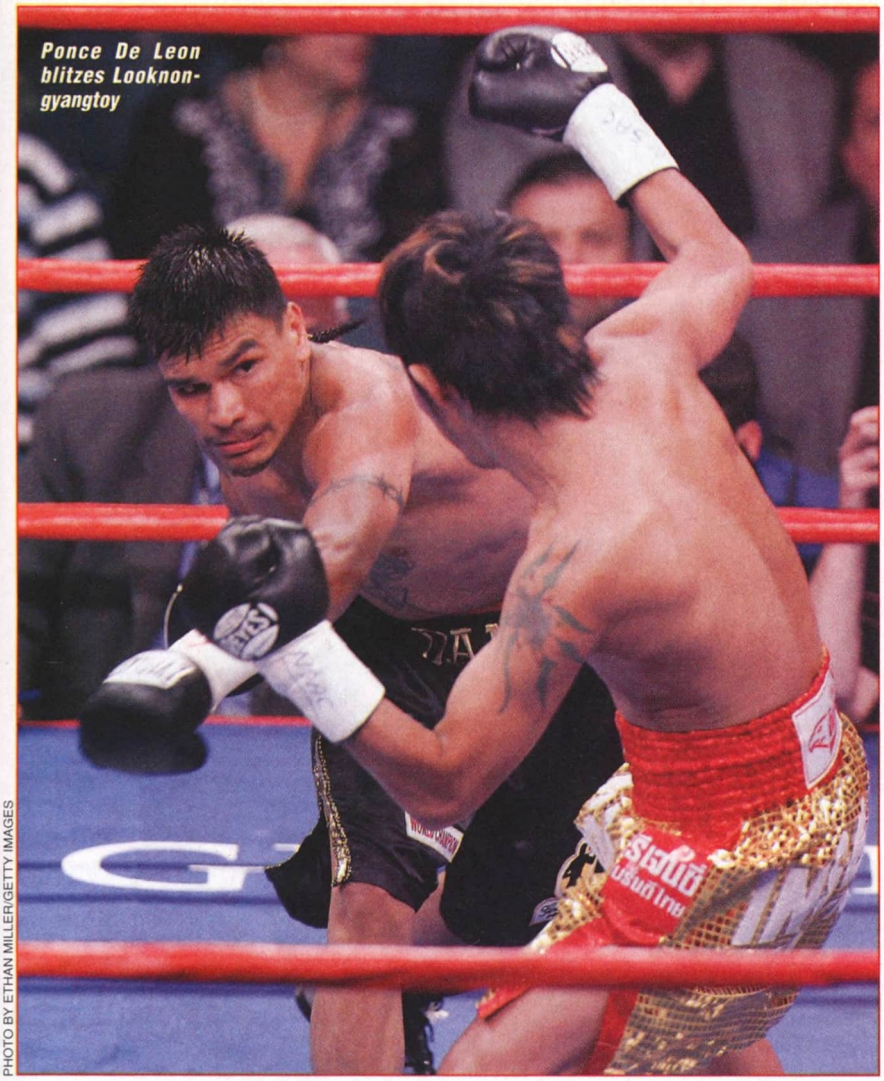
2 Daniel Ponce De Leon
33-1 (30)

Kayo Percentage: 88%

Why He's Rated Here: If you have excellent boxing skills, you can score a lot of knockouts if you also possess a half-decent punch. But how heavy do your hands have to be to score a lot of knockouts if you can barely box at all? Perhaps that's a slight exaggeration of how limited Ponce De Leon's technique is, but it's safe to say that, since he stepped up to world-class competition, he's never met an opponent less skilled than himself. But he keeps knocking guys out, and the reason is that when his punches aren't missing the mark wildly, when he isn't lunging in with them like a novice, they're absolutely devastating. Twenty of his 30 knock-outs have come in the first three rounds, and many have come as the result of one sudden fight-ending shot—usually with the crude south-paw's anchor of a left hand. When all you can do is punch, you'd better be exceptional at it to succeed, and the 27-year-old Mexican has won 33 of his 34 fights because his innate ability to hurt truly is special.

Best Knockout: The first time Ponce De Leon fought Thailand's Sod Looknongyangtoy, he was taken the distance for only the third time in his career—and it was competitive enough to warrant a rematch. The rematch lasted all of 52 seconds, and ended with Sod facedown, looking like it was going to take a spatula to get him off the canvas.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: Not only couldn't he knock out Celestino Caballero, he couldn't do *anything* against him. It was proof that if you have the defense and skill to make Ponce De Leon's power a non-factor, you can beat him without break-ing a sweat. Easier said than done, of course, but still, Caballero outboxed



Ponce De Leon blitzes Looknongyangtoy

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

him with ease (and some observers will tell you Gerry Penalosa did the same thing and just didn't get the decision).

1 Wladimir Klitschko
49-3 (44)

Kayo Percentage: 85%

Why He's Rated Here: For a combination of a high knockout percentage, a record filled with quality opposition, and a plentiful supply of *SportsCenter*-worthy endings, nobody else in the business right now compares to the reigning IBF heavyweight titleholder. He's been facing mostly world-class opponents for the last seven or eight years, and the knockouts keep piling up as if Klitschko is still fighting trialhorses, with 15 of his 18 wins since 2000 coming via kayo. He has bulldozing power in both fists. If you like your knockouts by left hook, see Wladimir's wins over Charles Shufford (KO 6) and Ray Austin (KO 2); if you're a right-hand fan, perhaps you'd prefer his blastouts of Derrick Jefferson (KO 2), Chris Byrd (KO 7), or Calvin Brock (KO 7). He's also stopped such quality foes as Lamon Brewster (KO 6), Jameel McCline (KO 10), Monte Barrett (KO 7), Ray Mercer (KO 6), Frans Botha (KO 8), Eliseo Castillo (KO 4), Danell Nicholson (KO 4), and David Bostice (KO 2). At 6'6" and 245 pounds, Klitschko maximizes his size, both in terms of keeping fights at the right distance and in terms of getting his weight behind his punches. Yes, he has a shaky chin, and no he isn't very fast. And his psyche is questionable, causing him to sometimes fight tentatively and not commit fully to his punches. When that happens, he's merely a good puncher, not a great one. But when he does commit fully, he's the best in the game.

Best Knockout: After going the distance with Byrd in their first fight, Klitschko was at his bone-crushing best in their 2006 rematch, battering the slippery Byrd, dropping him twice, covering him in blood, and halting him 41 seconds into the seventh round.

The Guy He Couldn't Knock Out: Only two fighters have gone the full 12 with Klitschko: Byrd, who got starched the second time around, and Sam Peter. Wladimir nearly jacked the neckless Nigerian, leaving him momentarily out on his feet with a 12th-round hook—hurting Peter worse than Peter hurt Klitschko on any of his three knockdowns—but he couldn't finish the job and had to settle for a decision win. ■

Byrd absorbs a flush right from Klitschko

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HEIMANN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

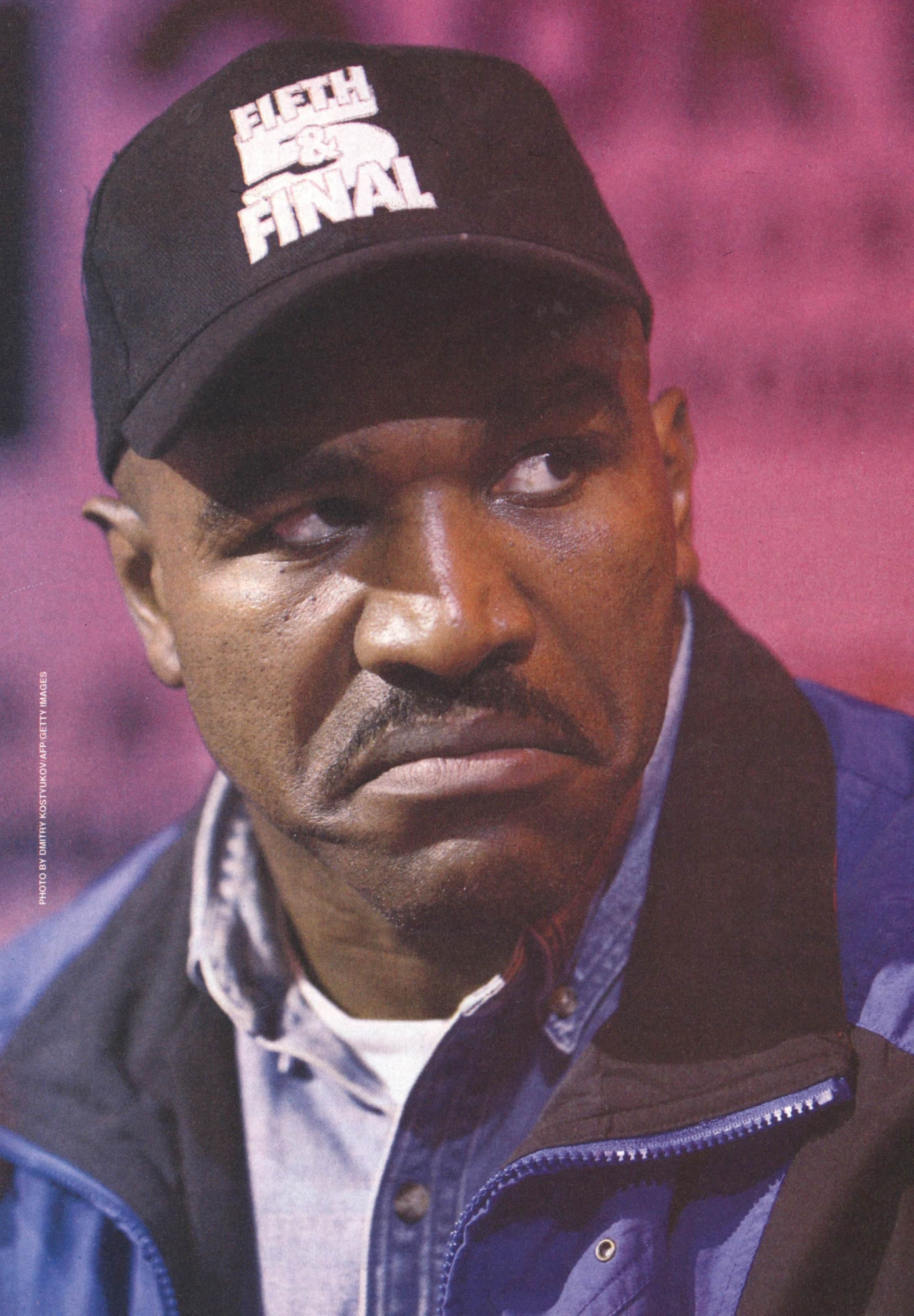


PHOTO BY DMITRY KOSTYUKOV/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

THE HOLY GRAIL ELUDES HOLYFIELD

Vander Travels 5,000 Miles And Comes Home Beltless

By Brian Doogan

"Each man kills the thing he loves ... the brave man with the sword"—*Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright and poet, recently named Britain's greatest wit*

As he stood in his corner at the end of the 10th round of a bout he was clearly losing, it was possible to see, for only an instant, a flicker of resignation cross the face of 44-year-old Evander Holyfield. He would deny it later while emphasizing how he took the fight to his opponent, Sultan Ibragimov, in the final round when he landed his best punch, a staggering right to the temple.

"I knew I was behind, so I went for it and I hurt him. I just couldn't finish him off," the former world heavyweight champion and future Hall of Famer reflected shortly before he left the Khodinka Ice Palace and walked out into Moscow's cold streets, which were lined with sleet and slush. "The fight went to a decision and Ibragimov won the decision. I just have to get back in line, but this doesn't mean that it's over."

It was over years ago, of course, but Holyfield will not easily give up the fight. Nor is he inclined to renege on his personal crusade to regain the world heavyweight championship, which resembles, increasingly, the satire

PHOTO BY TATYANA MAKEYEVA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

While there is little doubt that in his prime "The Real Deal" would have made quick work of Ibragimov, the Russian's sharper reflexes and intelligent boxing thwarted Holyfield's bid to win another alphabet title.

Ibragimov is not a big puncher, but his southpaw jab is sharp enough to discourage reckless attacks and pile up points. The best Holyfield did on any of the official scorecards was win three rounds.

and silliness of *Monty Python And The Holy Grail*. Holyfield has invoked God's name too, as he steadfastly marches on, resistant to the multitude who question his cause and even his sanity.

"Did I do so bad that it's not worth it for me to try?" he asked in a postfight telephone conference with American reporters. Freddie Roach, whose fighter, Dimitri Kirilov, won the vacant IBF super flyweight title on the undercard, was emphatic in his response.

"I remember when Eddie Futch, my old trainer, told me that it was time to quit and I didn't listen to him," said Roach, who attributes his own problems with Parkinson's to boxing and, specifically, to staying in the ring too long. "I had five more fights and I lost four of them. Eddie was right, I know now. There's always a time and Evander's has come. He's got nothing left to prove. I'd hate to see him end up being hurt. He's got a lot of money, but what's that worth if you can't count it?"

Money is an interesting issue because Holyfield, while he has earned around $200-million in his 15-year career, has enough outgoings to require the budget of a small banana republic. Holyfield supports all his 11 children by seven different women, five of whom were born out of wedlock. Alimony payments to his two ex-wives are a further drain on the fortune he has amassed through fighting, as is the upkeep of his opulently furnished mansion in Fairburn, Georgia, on the outskirts of Atlanta. The main entry to the home features a rotunda finished off with a handrail made of solid mahogany that is 280 feet in length. So impressive is his residence that it could belong to a southern gentleman rich in old money. But Holyfield's earning capacity has diminished with his advancing years.

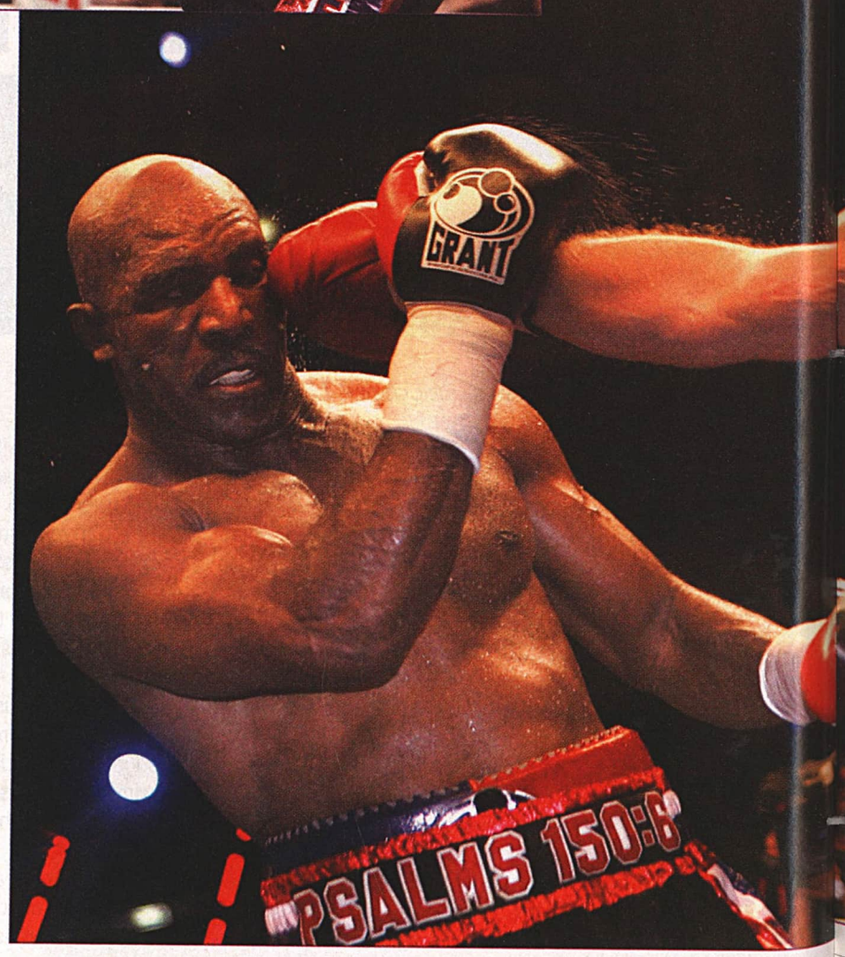
"My first championship fight against Buster Douglas I made $8-million," he explained. "My second I made $22-million, the third $17-million. I become four-time heavyweight champion (twice as an alphabet titleholder), then all of a sudden I get $250,000 to fight Jeremy Bates (in August 2006). I fight Fres Oquendo (in November 2006) and it's supposed to be $2-million and I get a goose egg. But it is not about the money for me. Money is not the issue. I think God feels boxing is just another job. What matters to Him is whether it's done fairly, whether it's done right. He is not concerned about material things and neither am I."

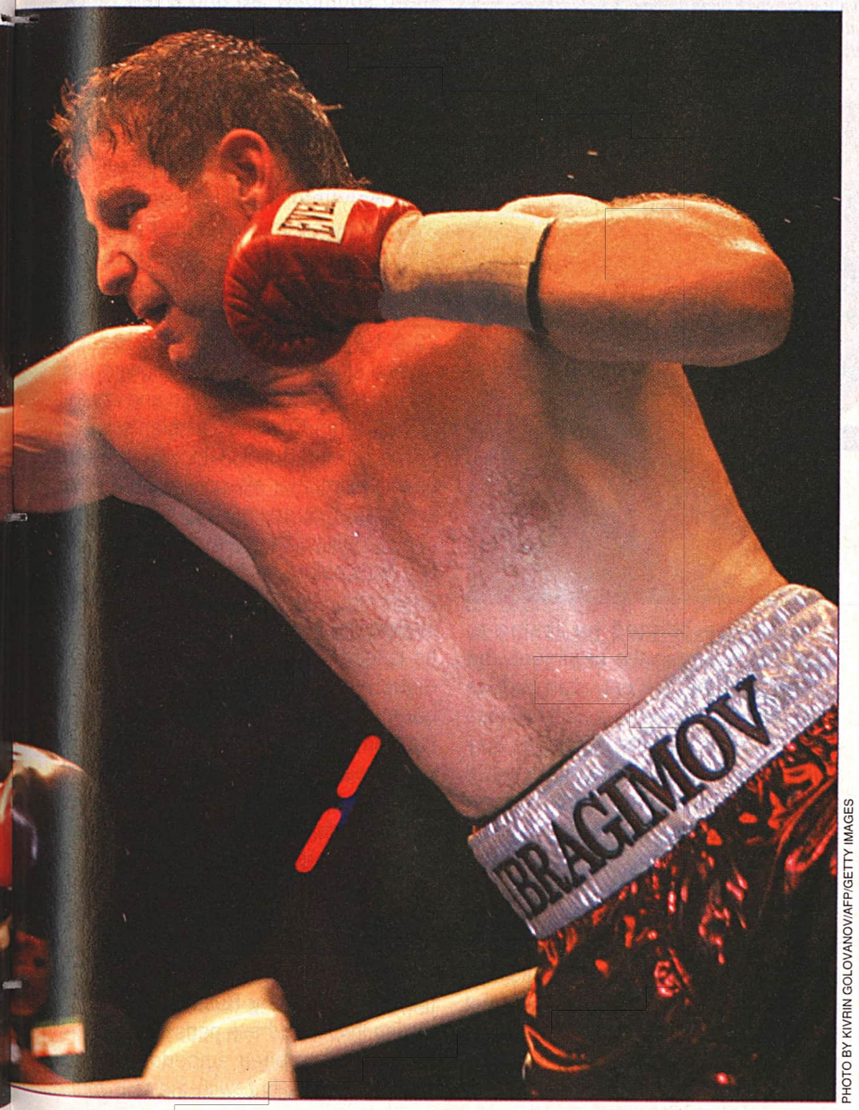
Perhaps, but Holyfield has acquired a lot in his life since the days when he worked for $2.65 an hour pumping fuel into private planes at DeKalb-Peachtree Airport in Atlanta, and it takes a lot to sustain the kind of lifestyle to which he and his family have become accustomed. For challenging WBO titleholder Ibragimov, he split a $6.5-million purse with the 32-year-old Russian, a larger sum than the amount that could have been generated in the United States, according to the promoter, Yuri Fedorov. Whatever his assertions to the contrary and whatever he says about his desire to retire as undisputed champion, money accounts for a significant part of Holyfield's motivation to continue his career.

Does this make him different than most world heavyweight champions when their careers reached the twilight? Muhammad Ali, after all, was betraying the embryonic signs of Parkinson's—slurred speech, a slow gait—even before his first fight with Leon Spinks in 1978, yet he fought Spinks again, then Larry Holmes and Trevor Berbick after an ill-advised comeback, retiring just short of his 40th birthday. It is a recurring theme throughout the history of the heavyweight division, the old champion trying to regain past glories when, clearly, he is no longer equipped for the job. Some got out, of course, and resisted the eternal quagmire: Gene Tunney, Rocky Marciano, Michael Spinks, Lennox Lewis. But for every Lennox Lewis, there is a Joe Louis, old, impotent, and balding when he reached his sad end at Madison Square Garden against Marciano.

So is Holyfield being held to a different, unjustifiably high standard by those who would rather see him retired? Was the New York State Athletic Commission fair in resorting three years ago to the suspension of his boxing license on the grounds of "diminished skills"? Is Holyfield killing the thing he loves, his legacy, his health, perhaps even his sport, by choosing to remain in the ring long after the skills that distinguished him have eroded? Ron Scott Stevens, the NYSAC chairman, had no doubts when he announced Holyfield's ban in New York in the wake of his listless performance against Larry Donald, his third defeat in succession, in November 2004.

"I'm not looking to end his career, if it's not warranted, but the health and safety of the boxer is the main concern of the State Commission," Scott insisted.





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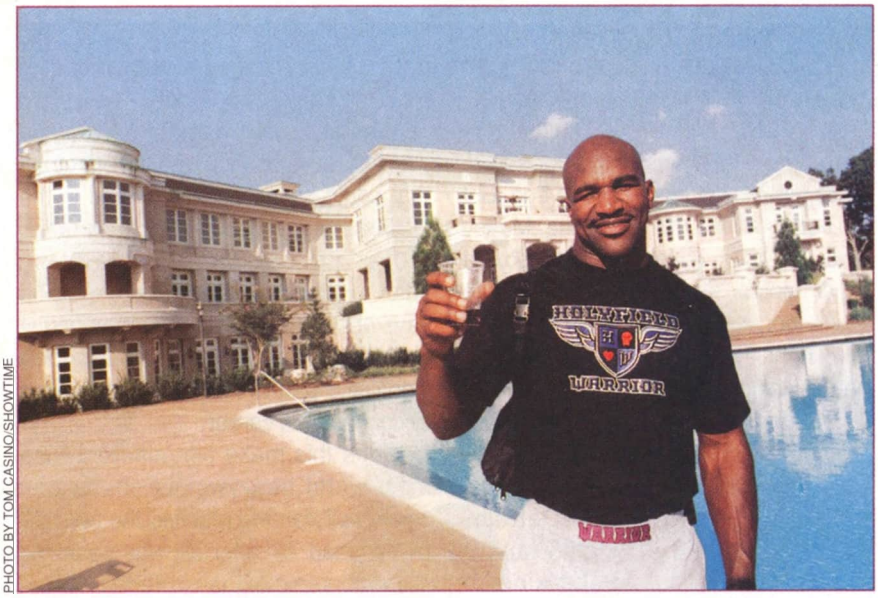

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

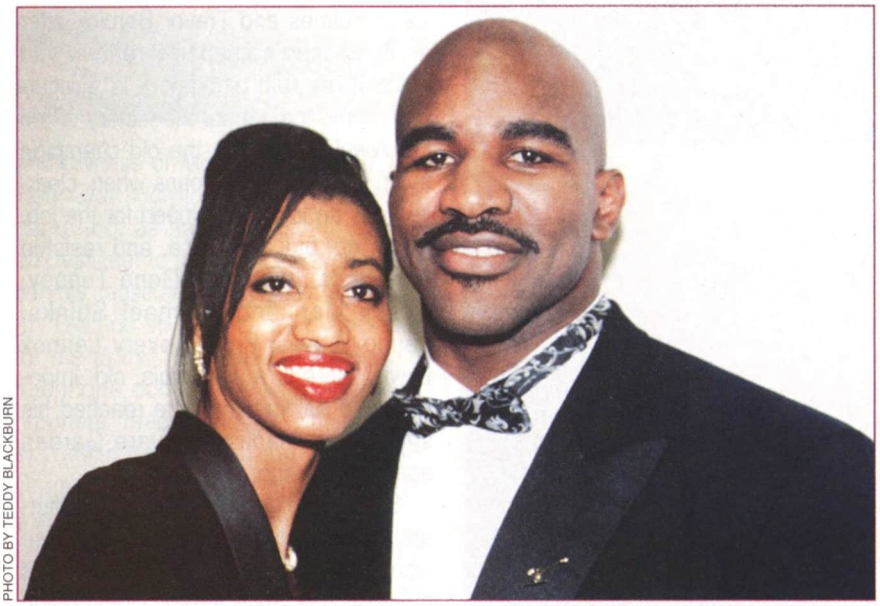

PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

Although Holyfield claims money is not the motivation for continuing to box, he clearly needs a substantial cash flow to maintain his Georgia mansion (above), and pay child support to his children, including the ones he had with his ex-wives, Dr. Janice Itson among them (below).

"To my practiced mind, Holyfield shouldn't be fighting anymore. It's the responsibility of the State Athletic Commission to save a boxer from himself. Evander Holyfield has absorbed enough punishment throughout his great career. It's time the bleeding stopped."

Holyfield has since beaten four opponents—Bates, Oquendo, Vinny Maddalone, Lou Savarese—and on October 13 he managed to stay the course with a fighter ranked sixth among today's heavyweights by THE RING. Some observers conclude, therefore, that he is being singled out for exclusion when he remains competitive to a degree. Should Bates, Oquendo, Maddalone, and Savarese be banned for losing to Holyfield? So goes the argument. But the reality is that the only standards to which Holyfield is being held are those he set for himself, extraordinary as they were. A former cruiserweight world champion, he overcame suspicions that he was merely a manufactured heavyweight to establish himself, arguably, as the finest fighter of the 1990s. Bates, Oquendo, Maddalone, and Savarese were never remotely near his league. Holyfield would have beaten Ibragimov soundly at his peak. Holyfield ought not to be judged by the flawed yardstick of what he may be capable of accomplishing still against also-rans. He must be judged by the standards of the great champion he was.

Sure, he managed to go the distance with Ibragimov, 219, Rostov-na-Donu, Russia, who beat Shannon Briggs to win the WBO belt in July, but he never appeared remotely capable of winning the fight after a slow opening round in which both men fenced mostly and landed little. Holyfield, 211½, just edged it, but, from the second round on, Ibragimov's lateral movement, relaxed rhythm, and more accurate punching posed problems for the ex-champion, and he lacked the dexterity to overcome them. The old gunslinger landed a right hand just before the bell, but he had been on the receiving end of Ibragimov's sharp southpaw jab and a few quick combinations, punctuated by a left to the body that did Holyfield no good.

"One shot is not going to do it," trainer Ronnie Shields told Holyfield in his corner between rounds. "Back him up with the jab and get your punches off." But Holyfield's performance was plagued by his inability to get punches off quickly enough to counteract Ibragimov's methodical accumulation of points. A left to the body by Ibragimov, 22-0-1 (17), caused Holyfield to take several steps back and he followed this up with a one-two to the chin and another left behind it. The Russian's hand speed rendered Holyfield, 42-9-2 (27), unable to counter effectively and he finished the round on top, landing his straight left and right hook in combination twice before the bell.

By round four, Holyfield was stepping in clumsily. A couple of right hands that he landed on Ibragimov's head had no discernible effect, and the Russian countered successfully with his own right and a straight left. Holyfield's jab was a pawing punch, thrown without authority, and Ibragimov was easily able to pick off most of them.

The atmosphere inside the Khodinka Ice Palace was far from raucous, with many seats in the arena unfilled. The cost of a ringside seat, $3,000, was far beyond the means of the overwhelming majority of ordinary Russians. Amateur boxing thrives in these parts because for so long it has been embedded in the popular culture, but, with the four main

alphabet titleholders in the heavyweight division all hailing from Russia and its surrounding countries, there is an opportunity for the sport to flourish here, and ticket prices is just one issue to be addressed.

As he tried to back up Ibragimov into a corner in the sixth round and missed with his right, Holyfield was caught by a stinging left-right combination. The American veteran missed his own one-two combination and was picked off by a punishing right hook. A straight left by Ibragimov, a left hook, and another straight left at the bell cemented another round for the Russian.

"You gotta take the title from the man right now," Ronnie Shields told Holyfield going out for the seventh, but the former champ was caught by a hard right hook and a left knocked him off-balance. Whenever Holyfield did manage to score, he was countered immediately, and Shields became increasingly anxious. "Come on, Holy, you gotta pick up the pace. You have to throw more punches and put pressure on him," he said. "Nothing happens unless you do it."

PHOTO BY TATYANA MAKEYEVA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Despite his deceptively soft-looking physique, Ibragimov is a tough, well-conditioned boxer. He never had Holyfield in serious trouble, but landed enough punches to jolt the 44-year-old veteran on several occasions.

Holyfield responded with a strong eighth round in which he landed a solid right to Ibragimov's jaw and remained busier throughout, but he was winded by his exertions and lost the ninth, then was clearly hurt by a bodyshot at the beginning of round 10. "It was a clean shot and it made me draw up ... it was a very good shot," Holyfield acknowledged. Suddenly, Holyfield was in danger of unraveling, as he had done in his stoppage defeat against James Toney in October 2003. A right jab snapped back Holyfield's head and another had a similar effect before Ibragimov opened up with an array of punches that left Holyfield with that disillusioned look as he returned to his corner.

He tried to take the initiative in the penultimate round, but slipped and fell onto his left shoulder when he missed, embarrassingly, with a right hand. Ibragimov remained cautious, but still took the round, so Holyfield threw caution to the wind in round 12. With a well-delivered right hand over the top, he knocked Ibragimov against the ropes and he also connected with another straight right. He was unable to sustain his effort, however, and even though he won the round, it was not nearly enough to make any difference. All three American judges scored overwhelmingly in favor of Ibragimov, Chuck Giampa by 118-110, Ruben Garcia 117-111, and Thomas Miller 117-111. THE RING also scored 117-111 for Ibragimov, a competent but hardly compelling performer. Nonetheless, he produced a conclusive result and, confidently, will put his shrew boxing brain to work against any of the other leading heavyweights.

As for Holyfield, the future is almost certain not to be one of "happy ever after." Will he keep fighting until he is seriously hurt or permanently injured? Will he retire if he is knocked out? Who knows? He kept fighting after being stopped by Toney. What can be stated with some conviction is that he is now a steppingstone for any heavyweight contender looking for instant elevation by virtue of beating up a veteran celebrity. Holyfield will never be able to achieve what George Foreman accomplished against Michael Moorer when he became the oldest man at 45 to win the heavyweight title because he lacks Big George's destructive power. So he will remain a touring loser until his day of reckoning arrives and, along the way, perhaps he will ponder one of Wilde's best witticisms: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." Sadly for Holyfield, any stars he will see are likely to be inflicted by the fists of a younger man. ■

Brian Doogan, THE RING's European correspondent, was ringside in Moscow for Ibragimov-Holyfield.

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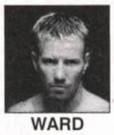

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The 20 Greatest Welterweights Of All-Time

By Gavin Evans

Peruse boxing history and you'll find that the richest zone in terms of consistent, high-level talent is welterweight.

The man widely rated as the finest-ever, pound-for-pound, Sugar Ray Robinson, was at his magnificent prime at welter, and several of its other giants would press hard for top-10 places in the all-time pound-for-pound ratings. That range from 135 to 147 pounds seems most capable of combining the speed and activity of the little fellas with the meat and power of bigger men. For posterity, look to the heavyweights, for thrills and spills, the middleweights, but when it comes to the consistent production of superior talent, the welters take the prize.

So we really are spoiled for choice, which means that the criteria chosen for making these selections becomes all-important. If, for instance, we used the time travel approach, effectively giving bonus points for the advances in technique, diet, and training that emerged during the 20th century, we would not be comparing like with like, and besides, they weren't even the same size. Due to the dubious current practice of day-before-the-fight weigh-ins, it is not uncommon for today's welters to come in at over 165 pounds by fight-time—a good four divisions heavier than many of the legends of the pre-World War II era. In fact, early in the last century, the welterweight limit was 142 pounds.

Another approach is to measure them on their best-ever night, but that seems unfair for those champions who built up a substantial legacy at welter. For instance, it is possible that Tommy Hearns might have bettered all but two or three of the men on our list, but does his record at 147 pounds match that of, say, Henry Armstrong?

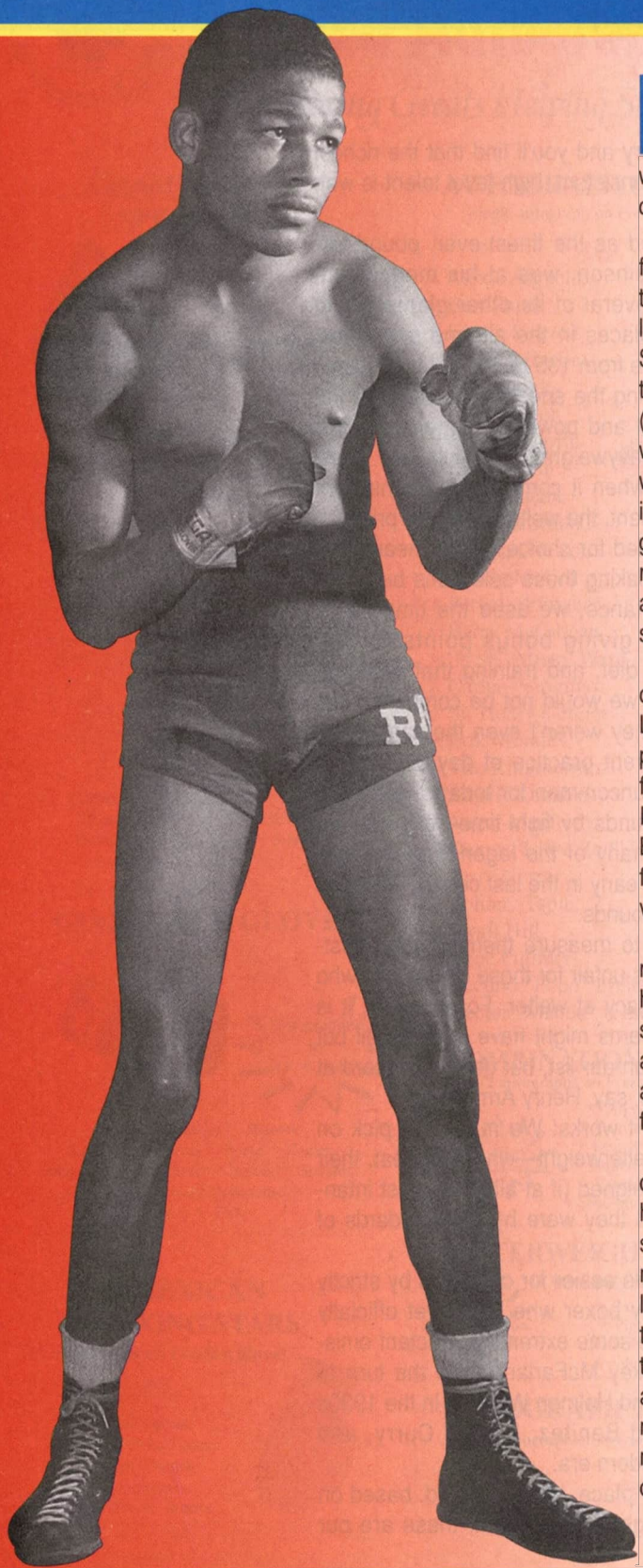
So then, this is how it works: We make our pick on what they achieved at welterweight—who they beat, their records, how long they reigned (if at all) and, most intangible of all, how talented they were by the standards of their day.

We have made it a little easier for ourselves by strictly banning from the list any boxer who is not yet officially retired, but still, there are some extremely reluctant omissions—in particular Packey McFarland from the turn of the century, Cocoa Kid and Holman Williams in the 1930s and 1940s, and Wilfred Benitez, Donald Curry, and Marlon Starling in the modern era.

They all deserve their place, but in the end, based on our criteria of welterweight achievement, these are our picks:

1 SUGAR RAY ROBINSON

175-19-6 (109) with 2 no-contests
World Champion 1946-'51



No argument here. Perhaps, at a stretch, you might be able to dream up a case for Ray Leonard or Thomas Hearns on their best night, but really, when it comes to overall welterweight achievement, the original Sugar Ray is nonpareil.

The 5'11" Robinson enjoyed most of his prime years fighting around the 147-pound limit, although more often than not he was pitted against bigger men. After a year at lightweight, in which he beat reigning world champion Sammy Angott, he moved up to outpoint future world welterweight champion Marto Servo (twice) and Fritzie Zivic (who, three months earlier, had narrowly lost his world welterweight title); then stopped Zivic in the return. He went on to beat all the top welterweights of his era, including Henry Armstrong, but it took six years before he got a shot at the vacant title, outpointing Tommy Bell. He reigned for four years, making five defenses, one of them a points win over future great Kid Gavilan, whom he also shaded in a non-title fight.

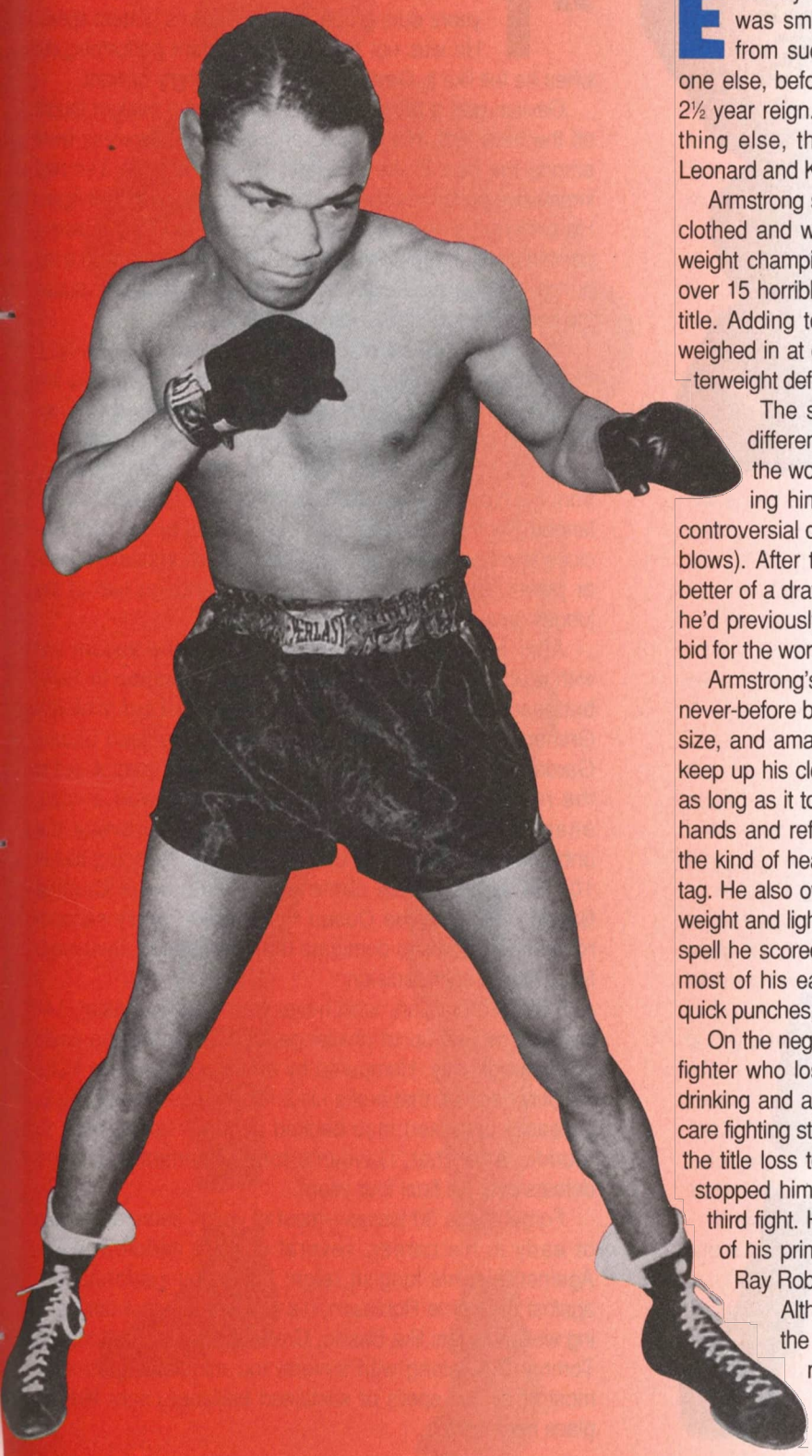
Many of his fights were at middleweight, but only one of these bigger men beat him in this period, Jake LaMotta, who outweighed Sugar Ray by a whopping 16 pounds (and bear in mind that Robinson beat LaMotta five times). No one ever beat Robinson at welterweight. Incidentally, the two men who held him to a draw, Jose Basora and Henry Brimm, were also middleweights. Ray flattened Basora in 55 seconds in the return and had previously outpointed Brimm.

Sugar Ray was a nasty piece of work outside the ropes, and even nastier inside: phenomenally fast hands and feet, with the sharpest-possible reflexes, split-second timing, jackhammer power in his left hook and right cross, an ability to end a fight from any angle at any moment, an extremely solid chin, and a huge fighting heart.

But he was not flawless. While fundamentally sound defensively, he was no Willie Pep. Watch the few films of his welterweight fights still available and you might be surprised at how many punches he absorbed. He did not much like boxers with top-notch jabs and was dropped at least five times prior to winning the world middleweight title, twice by welterweights, including in his surprisingly tight title-winning bout against Bell. In his last year or two as champion, he also suffered from weight troubles, his natural fighting weight being around 155 pounds, which made the 147 limit a bit of a strain in the days of same-day weigh-ins.

Still, these are small quibbles. Robinson at welterweight is as good as it gets.

2 HENRY ARMSTRONG
151-21-9 (101)
World Champion 1938-'40



Even by the standards of his day, "Homicide Hank" was small for welterweight, but this didn't stop him from successfully defending his title more than anyone else, before or since: 18 times in his remarkably busy 2½ year reign. It is this astonishing record, more than anything else, that pushes him ahead of the likes of Ray Leonard and Kid Gavilan for the number-two spot.

Armstrong stood 5'5" and weighed in at 133 pounds, fully clothed and well-fed, when, as the reigning world featherweight champion, he trounced the 142-pound Barney Ross over 15 horribly one-sided rounds for the world welterweight title. Adding to this remarkable picture is the fact that he weighed in at or under the lightweight limit for six of his welterweight defenses, once giving away 12 pounds.

The size of his opponents seemed to make little difference. As world welterweight champion, he won the world lightweight title against Lou Ambers (making him a triple champion), then lost it on a highly controversial decision (unfairly penalized five rounds for low blows). After this, Armstrong stepped up to get by far the better of a draw with the 153-pound Ceferino Garcia (whom he'd previously beaten in a welterweight title defense) in a bid for the world middleweight title.

Armstrong's assets were formidable: a work rate that had never-before been seen, remarkable physical strength for his size, and amazing reserves of stamina that allowed him to keep up his close-quarters, high-pressure, non-stop style for as long as it took. On top of all that, he had extremely quick hands and reflexes and underrated boxing skills, including the kind of head movement that made him a hard target to tag. He also owned a tungsten chin in his prime. At featherweight and lightweight he had concussive power (during one spell he scored 27 knockouts in a row), but at welterweight, most of his early endings came from the accumulation of quick punches, stopping 14 of his 18 challengers.

On the negative side, he was a dirty, or at least careless, fighter who lost several bouts because of foul tactics. His drinking and all-night partying, combined with his devil-may-care fighting style, contributed to his rapid burnout, prompting the title loss to Fritzie Zivic in 1940 at the age of 27. Zivic stopped him in the return, although Armstrong won their third fight. He was a 30-year-old shell of the great fighter of his prime when befuddled by the 22-year-old Sugar Ray Robinson in 1943.

Although Armstrong's peak came at a time when the welterweight division was relatively weak, he nevertheless beat some worthy bigger men, including Ross, Garcia, Britain's Ernie Roderick, and, eventually, Zivic.

3 KID GAVILAN
107-30-6 (28)
World Champion 1951-'54

"The Cuban Hawk" was world champion for 3½ years during one of the division's hottest spells. He was not the most consistent performer, but when he felt like it, Gavilan could be dazzlingly brilliant.

Gavilan was a boxer of immense skill who seldom fought off the back foot. His reflexes and defensive prowess were among the best in the division's history, and he also had impressive punch resistance, dropped just twice in 143 fights. His preferred style was to stay in the zone and fire blistering combinations of rapid-fire punches. Although he lacked a big punch, his aggressive boxing and flashy style (that included the bolo bodyblow) made him a crowd-pleaser.

Starting out in Havana as a 17-year-old featherweight, the Kid began to make his mark in the United States a few years later. In 1948, at the age of 22, he surprised the boxing world by holding the great Sugar Ray Robinson to a close, 10-round decision that prompted sustained booing from the crowd. Eight months and seven wins later he challenged Robinson for the title. The first half of the fight was close and competitive, but in the end the champion's superior power and experience prevailed, although two of the judges gave Gavilan six of the 15 rounds.

After a two-year wait, he finally won the vacant title with a one-sided points win over Johnny Bratton in 1951, but nearly lost it in his first defense, against old rival Billy Graham (they were 1-1 at that stage) at Madison Square Garden. Gavilan edged a controversial split verdict, but in the return, in Havana 14 months on, he won a wide, unanimous decision. Gavilan went on to break the unbeaten 39-fight record of Chuck Davey, stopping him in 10. His fifth defense came against the peak Carmen Basilio. This time the Cuban rose from a heavy second-round knockdown to dominate the later rounds, deservedly winning a split decision.

The 5'10"Gavilan, who never had trouble making 147 pounds, moved up to challenge Carl Olson for the world middleweight title. Hampered by an injured hand, he lost a majority decision that broke his 28-fight unbeaten run. Next, he easily outboxed mob-backed Johnny Saxton over 15 rounds. After that, Gavilan's form plummeted, with 18 defeats over his final four years.

Forget those 30 losses—most of which came either late or early in his career, several against middleweights. Against this, his longish reign, his stellar performances against the prime Robinson, his victories against outstanding welterweights like Basilio, Graham, Davey, Bratton, and Tommy Bell, along with several top middleweights, and, most of all, his spells of sustained brilliance, earn him his place near the top.

4 CHARLIE BURLEY

84-12-2 (50) with 1 no-contest

This one might seem a bit leftfield. After all, Burley was the man who trounced future *light heavyweight* great Archie Moore, dropping him four times and nearly stopping him, and, in turn, was twice beaten by future world *heavyweight* champion Ezzard Charles. The other thing he's famous for is being avoided at *middleweight* by the rising Sugar Ray Robinson and by every other 160-pound title claimant of his era.

All of this is true, but what is less widely known is that for the first six years of his brilliant 14-year career, the 5'9" Burley was a welterweight, coming in at between 145 and 150 pounds on no fewer than 38 occasions. Even when he moved up to middleweight he was on the small side. For instance, weighing just 151 pounds for his second fight against Charles (nine lighter than Ezzard).

Burley was an outstanding all-rounder—a master of self-defense, extremely well schooled, tricky, heavy-handed, versatile, and accurate. He was a precision puncher with perfect timing, and also owned one helluva chin. Moore described him as the finest fighter he ever faced, and many who saw him in action agreed.

Starting out in 1936 at the age of 19, he went 16-1 (or 19-1 according to some sources) before dropping a disputed split decision to leading welterweight contender Fritzie Zivic (who would go on to beat Armstrong for the world title). Three months later, he avenged that blemish and also won the rubber match with plenty to spare. In 1938, the 145-pound Burley lifted the "Colored Welterweight Title" on a wide, unanimous decision over the outstanding Cocoa Kid, dropping him three times.

At that stage, the only boxer within his weight range who could match him was another excellent black fighter denied a world title shot, Holman Williams. In their first fight, in 1939, Williams survived three knockdowns to edge the verdict, but in the return, in 1942 (when they both weighed 148 pounds), Burley prevailed. He took time off to knock out the 220-pound J.D. Turner in seven rounds, before winning his next two against Williams, stopping his great rival in their fourth fight in 1942. The final tally in the Burley-Williams series was 3-3 with 1 no-contest, but, overall, Burley's record at both welterweight and middleweight was significantly superior to his rival's.

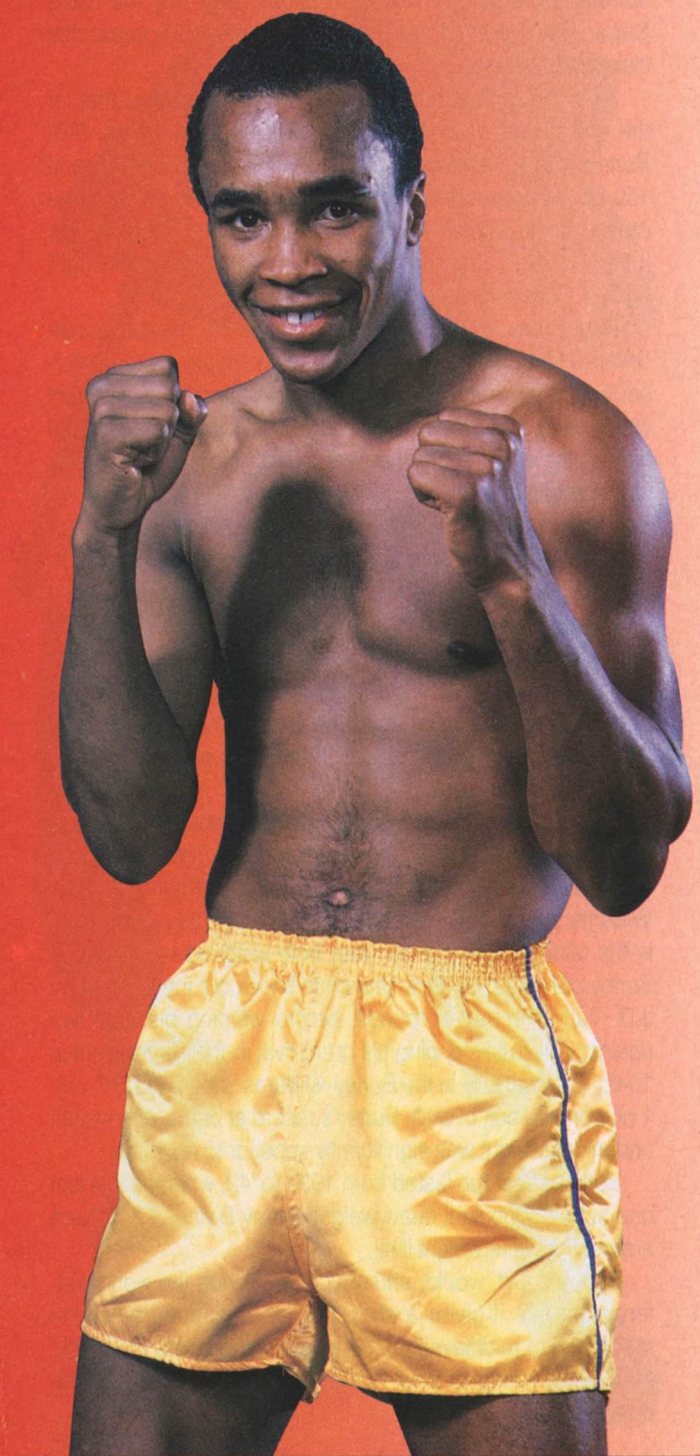
Burley's best run lasted from 1939 to '42, when he lost just one out of 27 (to light heavyweight Jimmy Bivins), 12 of them around the welterweight limit.

Burley could, would, and should have won the world welterweight title if given a shot, but, as happened when he moved up to middleweight, he was just too good, too black, and too unwilling to bow to the mob, and was denied the opportunity.

5 SUGAR RAY LEONARD

36-3-1 (25)

WBC Titleholder 1979-'80, '80-'81, World Champion 1981-'82



Posterity will probably push Leonard closer to the other Sugar Ray on this list. For the moment, what we can say with certainty is that he was the greatest welterweight of an era that produced a string of outstanding 147-pounders.

Leonard was a boxer of breathtaking brilliance—his blend of speed, skill, technique, power, and ring intelligence unmatched in his time. He could box, he could fight, his defense was tight, his reflexes as sharp as they come, he could take a good shot, and he was consistent.

After winning Olympic junior welterweight gold, he won 25 in a row as a pro before breaking the 39-fight unbeaten record of defensive master Wilfred Benitez, stopping him in round 15 to win the WBC belt. He looked set for a stellar reign, but after just one defense, an emphatic four-round knockout of Britain's Dave "Boy" Green, he lost the title to the rampant Roberto Duran, outfought by the great Panamanian, who goaded him into going toe-to-toe. But in the return, he danced his way around Duran until "Hands Of Stone" could take it no more, quitting in the eighth with his infamous "no mas" gesture.

After another defense, Sugar Ray moved up to stop the underrated Ayub Kalule in nine rounds for the WBA junior middleweight title, before unifying the welterweight title against the undefeated and seemingly invincible Tommy Hearns. This time Sugar Ray survived severe eye damage and came from behind to stop the WBA beltholder by battering him to defeat in the 14th round. Leonard made only one more defense before a detached retina prompted his retirement, and although he made a number of comebacks, he never again fought at welterweight.

Aside from that loss against Duran, this is the main count against him in these ratings. His record shows 27 welterweight fights (26 wins) during a five-year spell, but his reign as undisputed world champion lasted less than six months.

Incidentally, Leonard fought only once in his first five post-welterweight years, an unconvincing stoppage of Kevin Howard, but returned to squeak past the declining Marvelous Marvin Hagler for the world middleweight title, and then stopped Donny Lalonde for the WBC light heavyweight and super-middleweight titles. After that, however, it was downhill. Leonard got the worst of his drawn return with Hearns, then pecked his way past Duran in a boring rubber match before being trounced by Terry Norris at junior middle and finally, after another long retirement, was stopped in five by one-time super featherweight titleholder Hector Camacho.

Still, none of this has any bearing on his rating at welterweight, where his astounding, crowd-pleasing skills, wins over Hearns, Benitez, and Duran, and the fact that he unified a divided title, give him sound claim to make the top five on this list.

6 CARMEN BASILIO

56-16-7 (25)

World Champion 1955-'56, 1956-'57

The Upstate New York Onion Farmer is best known for his vicious win and even more vicious loss against the aging Sugar Ray Robinson for the world middleweight title. But his peak years were undoubtedly at welterweight, where he twice held the world title.

This broad-backed, 5'6" Italian-American crowd-pleaser was a swarming, heavy-handed brawler, who was as tough and strong as they come—and he never stopped coming. While no slouch defensively, his basic approach involved relentless assaults. He had seemingly unlimited reserves of stamina, a huge fighting heart, and an immense capacity to absorb punishment.

He turned professional at 21 in 1948 and gradually worked his way through the ranks as he learned his trade—mainly wins, but a steady pattern of points losses too. He finally hit his peak after four years. Victories over Ike Williams and a win and draw against previous conqueror Billy Graham helped secure him a shot at world champion Kid Gavilan. Basilio dropped Gavilan for a nine-count in the second round and was well ahead after six, but from then on the champion took over to win a split decision.

It took two years before Basilio was granted another world title shot, and this time he overcame a rocky start to stop Tony DeMarco in 12. In the return, five months later, a better-prepared DeMarco got the best of things until he began to wilt from the fearsome body attack that came his way, and once again it was Basilio who prevailed in the 12th—a war chosen as THE RING's Fight of the Year for 1955.

In Basilio's next defense, however, he lost an extremely dubious decision to Johnny Saxton, a fighter you had to knock out to beat. In the return, voted as THE RING's Fight of the Year for 1956, Basilio was all over Saxton, winning on a ninth-round stoppage—and he knocked him out in two in their rubber match.

Basilio relinquished his welterweight title to take on Robinson in 1957. His only losses in his previous 29 outings were that unjust decision against Saxton and the split decision against Gavilan. Negatives? He took too many punches, marked up easily, could be outboxed, and his record against some of the elite welterweights of his day was spotty: 0-1 against Gavilan, 1-1-1 against Graham, and 0-1-1 against Chuck Davey.

Still, his wins over DeMarco, Saxton, and particularly Robinson (at middleweight, although Basilio weighed only 153 pounds) established his reputation as one of the most exciting fighters of his era. He finally retired at the age of 34 in 1961, and in 1990 was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in his hometown of Canastota, New York.

7 JOSE NAPOLES
79-7 (55)
World Champion 1969-'70, 1971-'75

Known as "Mantequilla" (butter) because of his exceptionally smooth and pleasing boxing style, this Mexico-based Cuban could easily have won world titles at three weights, and perhaps more, if given the chance.

He was beautiful to watch—a wonderful blend of superb boxing skill and devastating power, timing, and accuracy with both fists, which took him to 15 world title victories in two reigns spanning 6½ years. Weaknesses included his lack of size and strength (he stood 5'7" and was really little more than a natural junior welterweight in his prime) and a tendency to cut (contributing to three of his defeats).

After a 114-1 amateur career, Napoles turned professional at the age of 18 in Santiago, Cuba, before relocating to Mexico City four years later, in 1962. After a spell at featherweight, he established himself as one of the world's leading lightweights, with occasional ventures at junior welter, but despite a long unbeaten run that included victories over a string of world-rated fighters at both weights, he could not secure a title shot.

Napoles had his last lightweight fight in 1968 and a year later, having bulked up to 143 pounds, he stopped Curtis Cokes in 13 one-sided rounds for the world welterweight title. He repeated the trick in 10 rounds two months later and then accommodated the challenge of the far bigger former welterweight and middleweight world champion, Emile Griffith, dropping him in the third on his way to winning a lopsided decision. This was followed by a 15th-round stoppage win over Ernie Lopez.

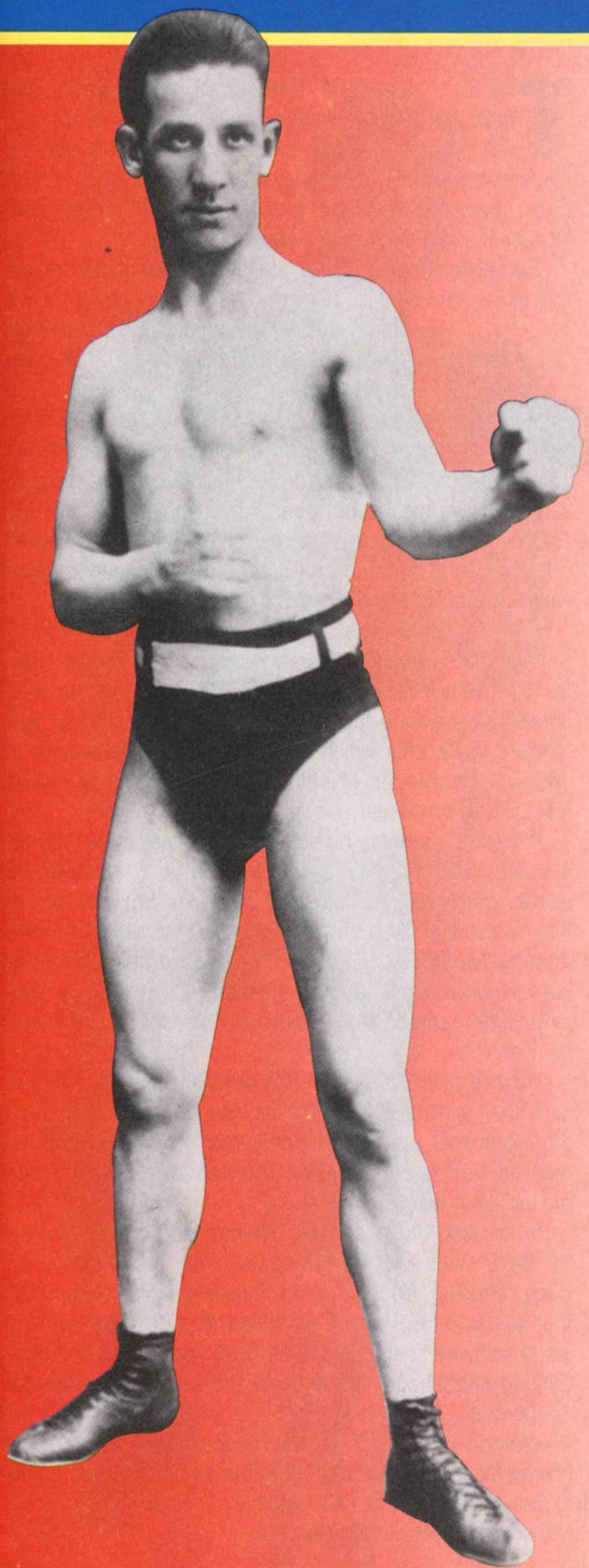
Napoles looked set for a long reign, but lost the title via cuts around both eyes in the fourth round against Billy Backus (Carmen Basilio's so-so nephew). Napoles regained it six months later, pounding Backus to defeat in eight easy rounds, and continued to dominate his division for the next 4½ years.

His only blemish came when his hubris saw him moving up to middleweight to take on far larger Carlos Monzon for the world middleweight title. The size difference was massive, proving too much for Mantequilla, who quit on his stool after six rounds. In this period, however, he beat several talented welterweights, including the Canadian Clyde Grey, Americans Hedgemon Lewis and Armando Muniz (both twice), and France's European champion, Roger Menetrey.

Eventually, however, age and a lifestyle that included bouts of heavy drinking, caught up with him, and in December 1975, the 35-year-old Napoles was cut up and stopped in the sixth round by Britain's John H. Stracey. This loss, in his adopted hometown of Mexico City, prompted his retirement a few months short of his 36th birthday. He was inducted to the International Boxing Hall of Fame on the first ballot in 1990.

8 TOMMY RYAN

86-3-6- (68) with 4 no-decisions, 6 no-contests
World Champion 1894-'98



Look at the record of this guy and you know he must have been something extraordinary—just three losses (four in some record books) in 105 bouts (and perhaps more) and world champion at two weights for 10 continual years. RING founder Nat Fleischer rated him the second-best middleweight of all-time, but he was really a welterweight, ruling as world champion for five years before moving up.

The 5'7" Ryan was known as a highly skilled defensive boxer who also carried paralyzing power in his right, and on top of that, could be as rough and tough as they come. He was also magnificently conditioned, using the most advanced training techniques of his day—regularly giving exhibitions of his bag-punching skills. He was versatile, innovative, and adaptable, able to cope with a variety of styles, almost always coming out on top.

Born Joseph Youngs in Redwood, New York, he ran away from home, changed his name, and worked in lumberyards, where he learned to fight. He turned professional at lightweight in 1887, shortly before his 17th birthday, and in 1894, he beat Irish-American Mysterious Billy Smith for the world welterweight title. In his first defense, he stopped the former world middleweight champion, "Nonpareil" Jack Dempsey (who weighed in at 142 pounds, the same as Ryan), in three rounds and followed that with a second defense against Smith (the bout was called a draw after the police intervened in round 18).

In 1896, he fought a non-title fight at middleweight against his former sparring partner, Charles "Kid" McCoy, who, according to legend, tricked Ryan by pretending to be ill. The champion arrived under-trained and unprepared and was stopped in the 15th round—only the second loss of his career. Incidentally, the pair later fought twice more, both declared draws.

In 1898, after one more welterweight title defense, the 147-pound Ryan stopped the 152-pound Tommy West in 14 brutally competitive rounds in a bout that gave him a claim to the middleweight title. A win over Jack Bonner later that year provided him with universal recognition. After five middleweight title defenses, including another intense, bloody battle with West, his career drew to a close in 1904, when he was still recognized as world champion.

In 1907, at the age of 37, he effectively made a comeback (although he had never officially retired), but a six-round points loss to featherweight contender Harry Forbes persuaded him to give it up for good. Along the way, Ryan trained James Jeffries to develop the crouch style that took him to the heavyweight title, and then trained Jim Corbett in how to counter this style.

9 JOE WALCOTT

92-25-24 (58) with 21 no-decisions, 2 no-contests
World Champion 1901-'04

The 5'1", 140-pound "Barbados Demon" was a little fella, even by the welterweight standards of his day, but old-timers would go into ecstasy when extolling his prowess. THE RING's founding editor, Nat Fleischer, who had a partiality for boxers from before his time, rated Walcott the greatest welterweight of them all.

Exceptionally strong for his size, with broad shoulders and long arms, Walcott was tough and skillful and carried serious power in both fists, which enabled to take on far bigger men. For instance, in 1902, he gave away 115 pounds to heavyweight Fred Russell and was considered to have been robbed by the drawn verdict after dropping the 255-pounder, who he'd previously beaten via disqualification. He knocked out Joe Choynski in seven in 1900 (dropping him five times)—a year before Choynski knocked out Jack Johnson, and in 1903, held future world heavyweight champion Marvin Hart to a draw.

The Barbados-born, Massachusetts-raised Walcott turned professional shortly before his 17th birthday in 1890. In 1897, with a record of four losses in 63 fights, he challenged Kid Lavigne for the world lightweight title but was stopped in 12, after which he moved up to welterweight. In 1898, he challenged Mysterious Billy Smith for the world title, but lost on points.

After that, however, he established himself to be the best man less than 142 pounds in the world. A 17-fight winning streak, which included a pair of wins over Smith, was broken in 1900 by Walcott's decision to throw his fight with Tommy West, following death threats, even after dominating 11 rounds. He finally won the world title in 1901 by stopping Rube Ferns in five. In his first defense, he easily outpointed West.

Walcott officially lost his fifth defense against Dixie Kid in 1904—a groundless 20th-round disqualification—but the result was widely discarded after it emerged that the referee had bet heavily on the challenger (who then moved up in weight).

In his next major contest, Walcott was held to a draw by the 21-year-old Sam Langford, with the Boston "Tar Baby" shading it according to ringside opinion. Less than four weeks later, Walcott was held to a draw by reigning world lightweight champion Joe Gans. Soon after, he accidentally shot himself in the hand and was out of action for 16 months.

Walcott got a shot at the vacant welter title against Honey Mellody in October 1906, but lost a 15-round points decision. After this, he lost regularly and finally retired shortly before his 39th birthday in 1911.

10 EMILE GRIFFITH

85-24-2 (23) with 1 no-contest
World Champion 1962, 1962-'63, 1963-'66

The things the sporting public probably know most about Emile Griffith are the twin burdens he dragged around with him for much of his life: first, his tragic 1962 bout with Cuban rival Benny "Kid" Paret, whom he beat to death in the 12th round, and second, the fact that he was gay or bi-sexual.

But there is far more to the story of this New York-raised Virgin Islander, who had three reigns as world welterweight champion and two at middleweight. Standing 5'7", he was strong and powerfully built with huge shoulders and long arms, and although not a heavy hitter, he had fast hands and good timing—with a 40 percent knockout ratio against welterweights. But his most potent asset was his array of skills. He was able to work effectively at any range, with an exceptionally tight defense.

Griffith turned professional in 1958 and won his first 13 before dropping a split decision to the middleweight Randy Sandy. An eighth-round stoppage over Willie Toweel and then a split decision victory over unbeaten Cuban Luis Rodriguez took him to his first world title shot. He knocked out Paret in the 13th round in April 1961, but five months later, Paret regained the title via split decision. This set up the rubber match in March 1962, with the Cuban stoking the fires by making illusions to his rival's sexuality. Griffith rose from a sixth-round knockdown to take control, and in round 12, he pinned Paret to the ropes and rained a barrage of punches on him. The referee, Ruby Goldstein, was slow in intervening. Paret went into a coma and died 10 days later.

Though he never got over this tragedy, Griffith tried to put it to it aside, and got straight back into the saddle, fighting seven times over the next year, including two more world welterweight title defenses. Then, in March 1963, he fought Rodriguez again and lost a close but clear decision. Better prepared for the return, he squeaked home on a split decision to lift the title for the third time, and repeated the fete, in their fourth fight, a year later. After three more defenses, he relinquished his belt and moved up to outpoint Dick Tiger for the world middleweight crown.

In 1969, at the age of 31, Griffith boiled back down to welter, but lost a wide, unanimous decision to Jose Napoles in a bid to regain the welterweight crown. All in all, he had 13 world welterweight title fights, winning 10 and losing three. Perhaps his best results were his 3-1 advantage over the outstanding Cuban, Rodriguez.

11 TOMMY HEARNS

61-5-1 (48)

WBA Titleholder 1980-'81

If we were to rate our welters on ability alone, no doubt the "Hit Man" would be a lot closer to the top. He is probably the biggest hitter in the history of the division (particularly with his right cross, but his bodypunching was also potent), he had a magnificent left jab, and, when required, he was also a highly skilled defensive boxer. Add to that his freakish size—a broad-shouldered 6'1"—and you can see why he was viewed as invincible.

The only welterweight to manage to find a way through was Sugar Ray Leonard, and that was after a titanic struggle that saw Hearns outbox him for long spells, building up a healthy lead before being battered to defeat in the 14th round. This fight revealed Hearns' kryptonite—his chin—but there were very few boxers who managed to exploit it.

Hearns got the better of Leonard in their draw eight years later, dropping him twice along the way, but he weighed 160 pounds for that one. He also beat two other outstanding welterweight champions—outboxing the defensive master, Wilfred Benitez, and flattening Roberto Duran in two—but those were at junior middleweight.

The point is, he never beat anyone very special at welterweight, and that counts against him in these ratings. Prior to lifting the WBA, title he stopped former WBA titlist Angel Espada, future WBA junior welterweight titlist Bruce Curry, and a few decent contenders. He looked mighty impressive in winning the title with a devastating second-round knockout of Pipino Cuevas, but the exciting Mexican is not regarded as one of the better champions. And Hearns' one year, three-defense WBA title spell was unremarkable.

He had an outstanding 155-8 amateur career, although he was known as a light-hitting defensive boxer in those days. It was only when he came under the tutelage of Emanuel Steward that he developed his power—winning his first 17 fights on knockouts, and by the time he fought Leonard, only two of his 32 opponents had survived the distance.

And yet, despite this record, "The Motor City Cobra" at 147 pounds was all about latent promise. It was a promise he came close to fulfilling against Leonard, but in the end, Sugar Ray prevailed, after which Hearns moved up.

He certainly went on to have a magnificent career. Aside from those highly impressive results against Benitez, Duran, and Leonard (in their return fight), he beat several other good men in impressive style, including the prime Virgil Hill and Dennis Andries at light heavyweight, Juan Domingo Roldan, Doug DeWitt, and James Shuler at middleweight, Fred Hutchins at junior middleweight, and Michael Olajide at super middle. And he claimed titles at five weights.

12 MICKEY WALKER

93-19-4 (60) with 46 no-decisions, 1 no-contest
World Champion 1922-'26

These days Walker is known mainly for the fights he didn't win: his thrilling losing effort against Harry Greb for the world middleweight title, his draw with future world heavyweight champion Jack Sharkey, who had a 29-pound weight edge, and his gallant stoppage loss to Max Schmeling.

But there is far more to his story. Aside from more than four years as world middleweight champion and victories over several of the world's leading heavyweights and light heavies, Walker was an outstanding welterweight champion, holding that belt for 3½ years.

The "Toy Bulldog" was rough, extremely brave and resilient, big hitting, and aggressive. He liked to work up close and was particularly effective with bodyblows, some of which went astray (he was disqualified three times in his early years). Although he was adept at slipping punches, he could be outboxed at the elite level, and his partying lifestyle contributed to weight troubles.

An Irish-American lad who loved to brawl, he turned professional in 1919 at the age of 18 and learned the ropes by fighting regularly (22 times in his first 12 months). In 1921, he was thrown in with the world welterweight champion Jack Britton, and although dropped in the first round, and then outboxed, he did well to survive the distance.

His manager, Jack "Doc" Kearns, secured him a return with Britton 16 months later, in November 1922. This time, the much-improved, 144-pound Walker dropped Britton three times and lifted the title with a unanimous decision—part of a 29-fight unbeaten run. He defended his title four times during this spell, but most of his fights were against bigger men. In 1925, weighing 149 pounds, he got the better of a 12-round no-decision fight with reigning world light heavyweight champion Mike McTigue.

Later that year, he gave away seven pounds to Harry Greb in a bid for the world middleweight title, but was clearly outpointed (after which, legend has it, they resumed hostilities in the street). After this setback, he made two more welterweight title defenses—against Dave Shade and Sailor Friedman—but in April 1926, he came in out of shape and lost his crown to a man he'd previously bettered, Pete Latzo, who used movement and skill to outbox the Toy Bulldog.

Walker moved up to middleweight, winning a dubious 10-round decision over Tiger Flowers to take the title. He defended four times and also beat three world light heavyweight champions, McTigue, Paul Berlenbach, and Maxie Rosenbloom (but narrowly failed in two bids for this belt). He eventually relinquished his middleweight title and beat several heavyweight contenders, including Johnny Risko (twice), King Levinsky, and Paulino Uzcudun. He was considered unlucky not to get the verdict against Sharkey. Walker retired in 1935.

13 JACK BRITTON

104-27-21 (28) with 190 no-decisions, 2 no-contests
World Champion 1915, 1916-'17, 1919-'22

Britton is invariably bracketed with Ted "Kid" Lewis when it comes to welterweight history—hardly surprising, considering they fought each other 20 times in six years. Their final tally was four wins for Britton, three for Lewis, one draw, and 12 no-decision bouts, giving the Irish-American a marginal lead.

Born William J. Breslin, he earned a reputation as a streetfighter, growing up in Clinton, New York. He turned professional shortly before his 20th birthday, in 1905, losing his first two fights. But he began to make progress after his management was taken over by Dan Morgan, who slowly steered him up the ranks and helped instill a hard work ethic.

The 5'8" Britton developed into a highly elusive boxer—tricky, quick on his feet, adaptable, and sound on the inside, although he lacked a knockout punch. He was also extremely tough—being stopped only once in 344 bouts (and that was in his second fight, at bantamweight).

The first decade of his career was fought mainly at lightweight, but by 1915 he had moved into contention at welterweight. It was then that he had his first bout with the rampaging Londoner, Lewis, resulting in a no-decision outcome. Five months later, they fought again for the world title, and Lewis won on points and beat him again in their third fight. Britton challenged twice more, but although he shaded the second of these, the no-decision rule meant he went home without the belt. Finally, in April 1916, he outpointed Lewis over 20 rounds to become world champion at the age of 31.

He beat Lewis again six months later, but in June 1917 it was the Englishman's turn—once more in a 20-rounder. Britton remained extremely active, twice more challenging for the world title in no-decision bouts that went the distance while twice getting outboxed by the great world lightweight champion, Benny Leonard. Finally, in March 1919, Britton regained the title by scoring a surprise ninth-round knockout of his old foe Lewis—the only one of their series to end inside the distance.

In some record books, he is credited with 13 title defenses over the next 3½ years, the most intriguing of which came against Leonard in 1922. Britton shaded the first 12 rounds, but in the 13th, Leonard dropped him with a bodypunch and then tapped him while he was down—earning a disqualification. Some reporters suggested the result was a fix.

Four months later, the 37-year-old Britton lost his title on points to the powerful 21-year-old, Mickey Walker, but he continued to box with mixed results for another eight years, finally retiring at the age of 45 in 1930.

14 TED "KID" LEWIS

173-30-14 (71) with 65 no-decisions
World Champion 1915-'16, 1917-'19

When rating Lewis at welterweight, you inevitably come up with the Britton problem. The Englishman always slots in one place behind the American, who enjoyed a one-victory edge in their 20-fight series, but there's a sense that the Kid achieved more overall and the order could be reversed when assessing their entire careers.

Gershon Mendeloff, as his parents called him, started out at flyweight and ended up winning titles at middleweight and light heavy. He stood 5'8" and weighed around 140 pounds, but his immense physical strength, tenacity, stamina, swarming style, and punching power meant this globetrotting Londoner could hold his own against far bigger men. He was extremely hardy, took a good punch, and employed a crouching, bob-and-weave style hardly typical of the times, especially in Britain.

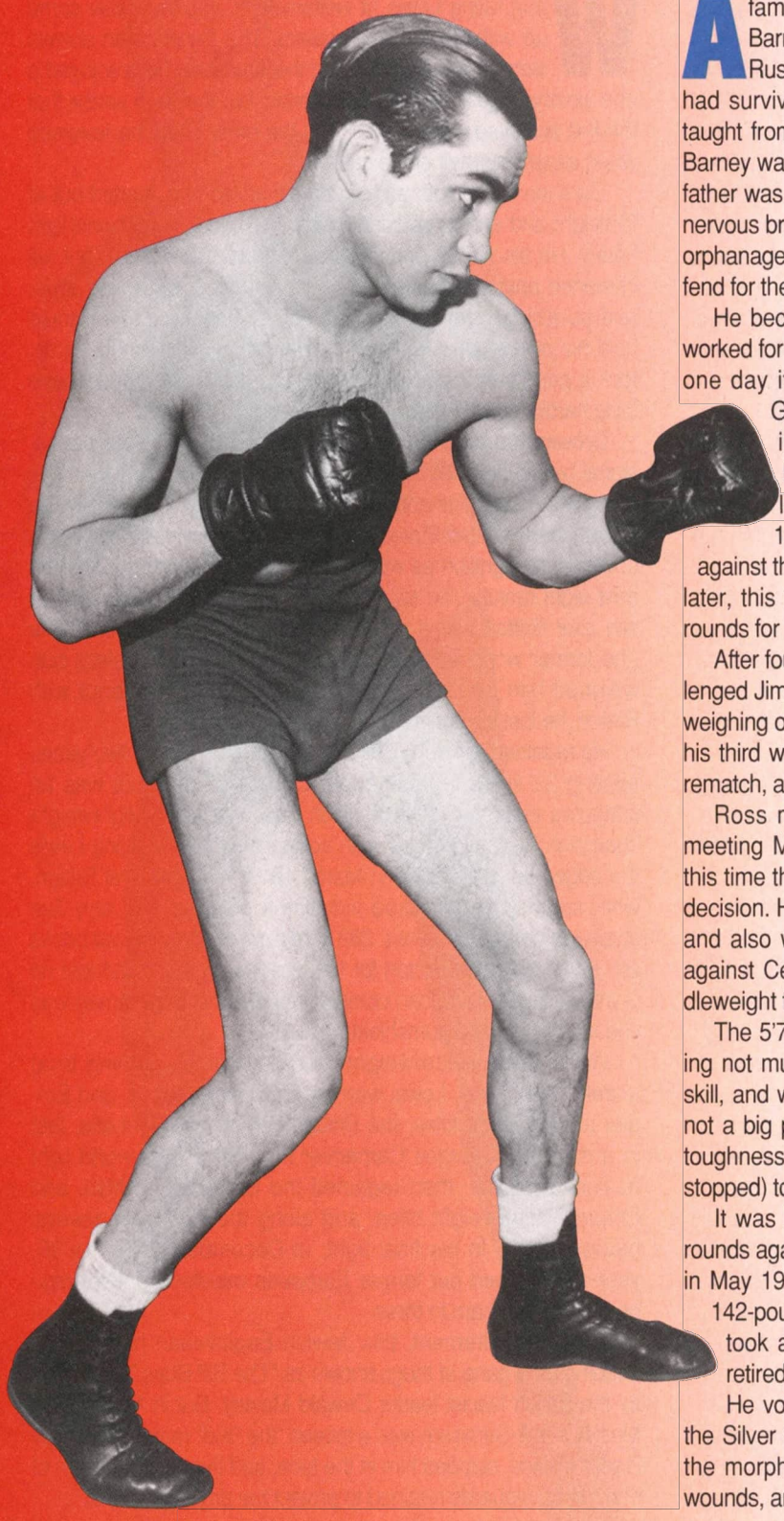
Growing up tough in London's East End, he turned professional before his 15th birthday and after four years lifted the British and Empire featherweight title. After a spell in Australia, he moved to the United States and in 1915 outpointed Britton to win universal recognition as world welterweight champion. Over the next eight months, he squeezed in 18 bouts, including another win over Britton and a newspaper decision over Willie Ritchie (the former world lightweight champion, who nevertheless outweighed him by four pounds). Finally, in his fifth bout with Britton, he lost his crown.

He regained it in June 1917 and reigned for nearly two years, fighting 32 times in this period. One of these bouts was an intriguing eight-round no-decision affair with world lightweight champion Benny Leonard, with some newspapers giving Lewis the edge. He lost the title in March 1919 to his old rival Britton, who, surprisingly, knocked him out in nine—one of only five stoppage defeats on Lewis' 282 fight record (some record books list 300). He fought Britton for the last time in 1921 and lost on points, with the American complaining that the Englishman was cheating by using a gumshield.

While still a welterweight, and sometimes coming in at under 140 pounds, Lewis won the European, British, and Empire middleweight titles, the British light-heavyweight title, lost in a round to Georges Carpentier in a bid for the world light heavyweight title, then regained the European, British, and Empire welterweight titles, and along the way beat several heavyweights. In his final fight, in December 1929, the 36-year-old knocked out former European middleweight champion Johnny Basham in three.

After his retirement, this Jewish Englishman had a spell heading up a gang of thugs known as "The Biff Boys," employed by the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley. But in 1932, when Mosley's anti-Semitism was exposed, the "Kid" marched into his leader's office, slapped him in the face, and then laid out each of the four bodyguards retained to protect the pro-Nazi leader.

15 BARNEY ROSS
72-4-3 (22) with 2 no-decisions
World Champion 1934, 1935-'38



A family tragedy set off a train of events that prompted Barney Ross to box. Born Beryl Rosofsky, the son of a Russian-Jewish Talmudic scholar and store owner who had survived the pogroms to emigrate to Chicago, he was taught from an early age to leave the fighting to the atheists. Barney was raised to become a rabbi, but when he was 13, his father was murdered during a store robbery. His mother had a nervous breakdown and his younger siblings were placed in an orphanage, while Barney and his two older brothers were left to fend for themselves.

He became a streetfighter and petty gangster, who once worked for Al Capone, while boxing on the side in the hope that one day it would earn him some money. After winning a Golden Gloves title, he turned professional aged 19, in 1929. Fighting at lightweight, he went 42-2-2 before challenging Tony Canzoneri for the world lightweight and junior welterweight titles in June 1933. The 23-year-old Ross won a majority decision against the favored Italian and repeated the fete three months later, this time via split decision (when Canzoneri lost three rounds for low blows).

After four more junior welterweight title defenses, Ross challenged Jimmy McLarnin for the world welterweight title. Despite weighing only 137 pounds, he prevailed via split decision to win his third world title. However, four months later, they fought a rematch, and it was McLarnin who edged the split-verdict.

Ross made three more junior welter defenses before meeting McLarnin in their rubber match, in May 1935, and this time there was no doubt, with Ross winning a unanimous decision. He held the title for three years, made two defenses, and also won 15 non-title fights. Three of these wins were against Ceferino Garcia, who went on to win the world middleweight title.

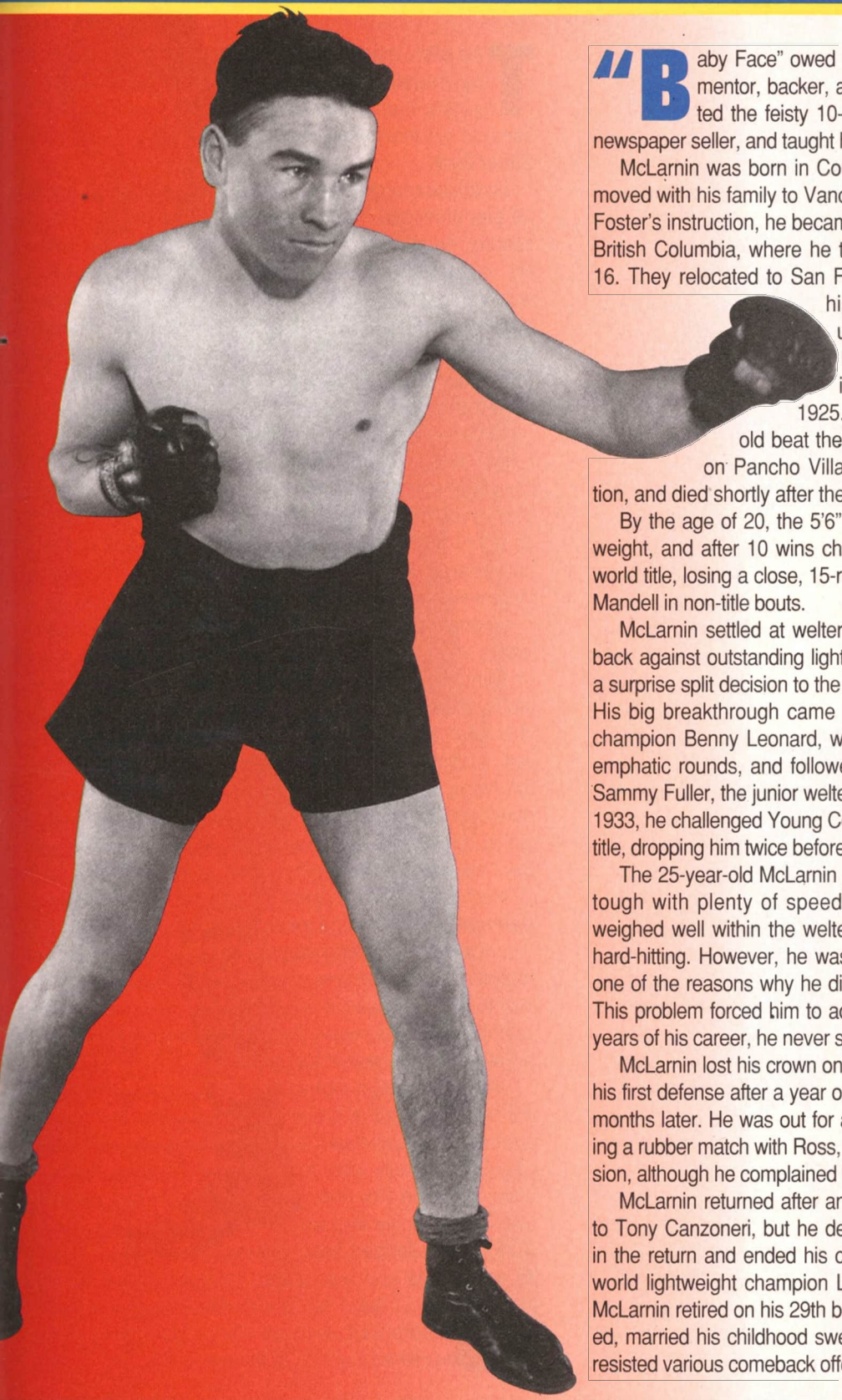
The 5'7" Ross was small for a welterweight, usually weighing not much more than 140 pounds, but his speed, elusive skill, and workrate made him a formidable champion. He was not a big puncher, relying on boxing technique, stamina, and toughness (dropped only three times in 81 bouts, and never stopped) to prevail.

It was his heart and chin that got him through 15 torrid rounds against world featherweight champion Henry Armstrong in May 1938. Despite his nine-pound weight advantage, the 142-pound Ross could not keep "Hammering Hank" off, and took a terrible beating over 15 rounds. He immediately retired, still only 28 years old.

He volunteered for the Marines in World War II and won the Silver Star for bravery under fire, but became addicted to the morphine he was given in the hospital to treat his war wounds, an addiction he eventually beat.

16 JIMMY McLARNIN

62-11-3 (20) with 1 no-decision
World Champion 1933, 1934



"Baby Face" owed his boxing career to his long-time mentor, backer, and trainer, Pop Foster, who spotted the feisty 10-year-old defending his pitch as a newspaper seller, and taught him to box—later managing him.

McLarnin was born in County Down, Northern Ireland, but moved with his family to Vancouver when he was three. Under Foster's instruction, he became amateur flyweight champion of British Columbia, where he turned professional at the age of 16. They relocated to San Francisco, where McLarnin made his mark at bantamweight, going unbeaten in 23 fights. His first loss came against the outstanding contender Budd Taylor in 1925. But in his next fight, the 18-year-old beat the reigning world flyweight champion Pancho Villa (who fought with a tooth infection, and died shortly after the bout).

By the age of 20, the 5'6" McLarnin had moved up to lightweight, and after 10 wins challenged Sammy Mandell for the world title, losing a close, 15-round decision. He later twice beat Mandell in non-title bouts.

McLarnin settled at welterweight and twice avenged a setback against outstanding lightweight Billy Petrolle, but then lost a surprise split decision to the excellent southpaw, Lou Bruillard. His big breakthrough came against former world lightweight champion Benny Leonard, whom he battered to defeat in six emphatic rounds, and followed that with a knockout win over Sammy Fuller, the junior welterweight champion. Finally, in May 1933, he challenged Young Corbett III for the world welterweight title, dropping him twice before stopping him in the first round.

The 25-year-old McLarnin had reached his peak—quick and tough with plenty of speed and skill. Although he usually weighed well within the welterweight limit, he was strong and hard-hitting. However, he was prone to hand injuries, which is one of the reasons why he didn't have a higher knockout ratio. This problem forced him to adapt his style, and for the final 3½ years of his career, he never scored another knockout.

McLarnin lost his crown on a split decision to Barney Ross in his first defense after a year out of the ring, but regained it three months later. He was out for another eight months before fighting a rubber match with Ross, which he lost via unanimous decision, although he complained bitterly that he'd been robbed.

McLarnin returned after another year out to drop a decision to Tony Canzoneri, but he decisively beat the Italian-American in the return and ended his career with a victory over reigning world lightweight champion Lou Ambers. On Foster's advice, McLarnin retired on his 29th birthday with his money well invested, married his childhood sweetheart, set up a small business, resisted various comeback offers, and lived to the age of 96.

17 LUIS RODRIGUEZ

107-13-1 (49) with 1 no-contest
World Champion 1963

This slick, quick, elusive counterpuncher was trained by Angelo Dundee and watched carefully by a young man called Cassius Clay—who modeled some of his moves on what he witnessed in Miami's 5th Street Gym.

Rodriquez turned professional in Havana at the age of 19 and proved to be the number-one welterweight in his country, twice beating his main rival, Benny "Kid" Paret. He relocated to Miami in 1959, announcing his arrival with a decisive victory over former welterweight title claimant Virgil Akins, and continued with his unbeaten run. Though not a huge puncher, the smooth skills of this 5'8" stylist proved more than enough to beat the best Americans.

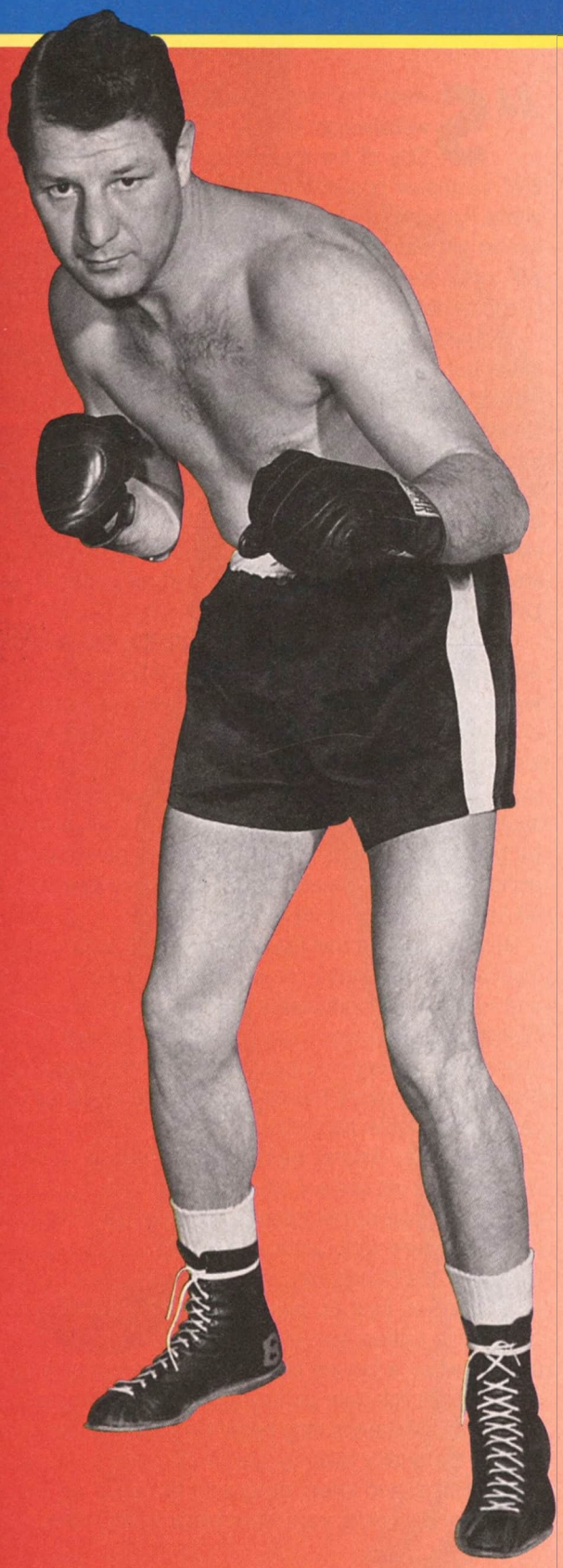
In December 1960, at the age of 23, after an unbeaten run of 36 fights, he fought Emile Griffith in a world title eliminator and ended up losing a paper-thin split decision. Eight months later, he dropped another disputed split decision, this time to future champion Curtis Cokes, but he decisively avenged that one in December 1961, winning nine of the 10 rounds.

Rodriguez challenged Griffith again in March 1963, following an impressive 12-victory run, and this time pulled it off with a bit to spare—outboxing his rival to take a unanimous decision and the world title. But his reign as world champion was brief. Three months later, he lost another split verdict to Griffith and the same thing happened the following year (this time, the result influenced by a deducted point because of a low blow). So although Griffith enjoyed a 3-1 advantage, all three of those wins were disputed, while Rodriquez' single win was clear-cut.

Rodriguez won his next 15 fights, ranging between welterweight and middleweight. He twice beat Ruben "Hurricane" Carter and stopped George Benton in nine rounds, but the run was broken by a surprise stoppage loss to old foe Cokes in July 1966—with weight problems contributing to the result. This marked the end of the welterweight component of his career.

After 77 fights, it looked like the Cuban was slipping, but there was still a bit left in the tank. He returned for another impressive run that saw him winning 24 of his next 25. The only loss, to future WBC light heavyweight titlist Vincente Rondon, was quickly avenged, and he twice beat Bennie Briscoe. At the age of 32, in his 104th fight, he challenged Nino Benvenuti for the world middleweight title and was ahead on points when he was knocked out in the 11th round. After this, he was still capable of surprises, but was starting to lose more frequently. He retired in 1972, at the age of 35.

18 BILLY GRAHAM
102-15-9 (26)



If ever a welterweight deserved to win a world title, it was Graham. He beat Kid Gavilan, Carmen Basilio, and future world middleweight champion Joey Giardello, but never managed to walk away with a belt.

By rights he should have prevailed when he met Gavilan for the third time at Madison Square Garden, in August 1951. The New York master boxer fought very well, tying up the oddly lethargic Cuban on the inside while using his jab and stiff right to rack up the points. Most ringsiders felt Graham had nicked it, but the split decision went the other way, amid rumors that the judges were "influenced" by the fact that Billy's management had refused to sell his contract to the mob.

Graham began boxing as a child and excelled. At the age of 18, after being refused entry into the New York Golden Gloves because of a heart murmur, he turned professional. His first four years were spent at lightweight—his record showing 58 fights with no defeats.

His early welterweight years were not quite so stellar and included five points defeats to top contenders, but by 1949 he had had reached a level where only Gavilan stood a chance. Standing 5'7" and weighing 144 pounds, Graham was a superbly versatile boxer. While not a big puncher, his blows were sharp, accurate, and well timed, and he seemed equally adept on the inside or at range—and very hard to tag. He was quick on his feet, owned a snappy lab, maintained a high workrate, and had a tungsten chin (never dropped in 14 years as a professional).

He was gifted a controversial split decision in his first fight with Gavilan in 1950. Later that year, they fought again and Gavilan got his revenge. Graham was bitterly disappointed by the verdict in their third bout, but was soon back in business, only this time his unbeaten run was ended by a hotly disputed split-decision loss to Giardello.

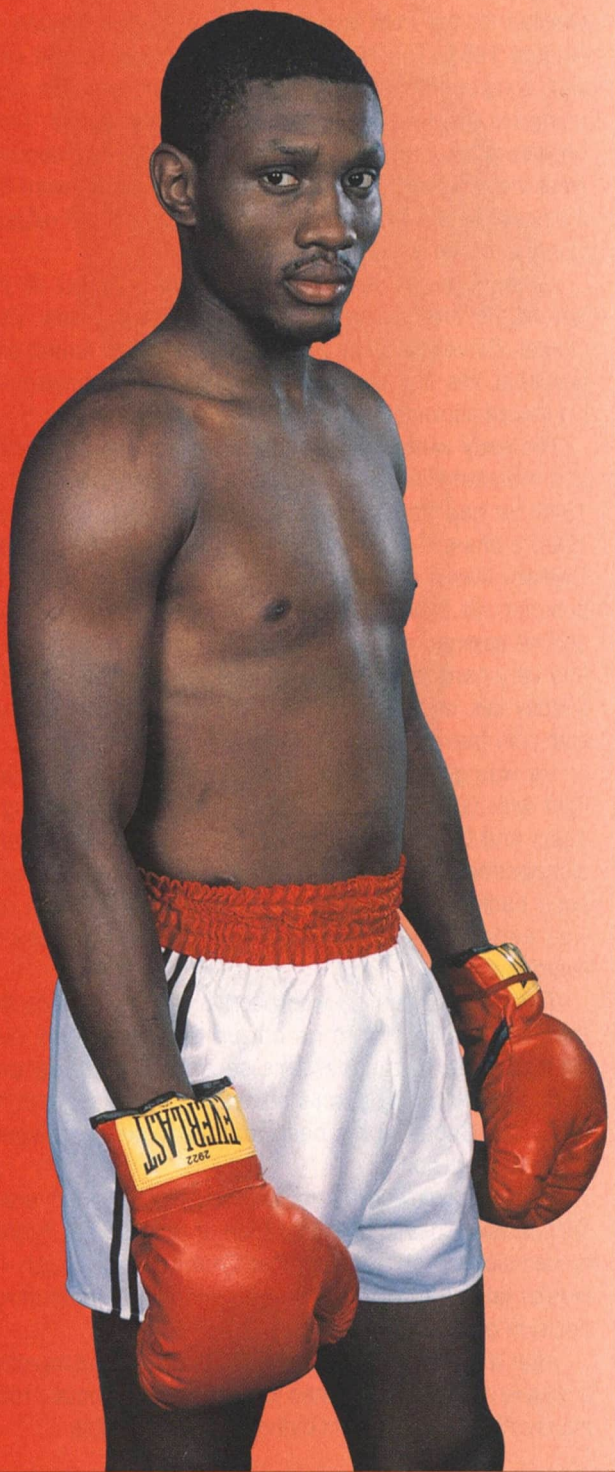
Two weeks later, he was back in the ring to face the rampant Basilio, whom he cut up and thoroughly outclassed over 10 rounds. This secured him his second world title shot, in Gavilan's hometown of Havana, but he found the Cuban at his best, and there was no dispute about the decision.

This was followed by yet another, highly controversial split decision loss to Giardello (one of eight split or majority decisions that went against Graham)—although 12 weeks later he got his revenge, winning a unanimous decision over the bigger man.

After a close loss and draw with Basilio, he put together a couple more wins and then lost his final four bouts, retiring shortly before his 33rd birthday after 126 fights.

19 PERNELL WHITAKER

40-4-1 (17) with 1 no-contest
WBC Titleholder 1993-'97



"Sweet Pea" was truly great at 135 pounds, but at welterweight he was merely exceptionally good. One of the most illusive boxers in history, the 5'6" southpaw box of tricks relinquished his undisputed world lightweight title in 1992 and from then on boxed almost exclusively at welter (except for one fight to win the IBF junior welter title in 1992 and another to lift the WBA junior middleweight title in 1995).

In March 1993, he won the WBC welterweight title on a close but unanimous decision over the excellent James "Buddy" McGirt, and then went in as underdog against Julio Cesar Chavez. Both were past their primes, but the way it went suggested that whenever they fought, Sweet Pea would have had the edge. He outboxed Chavez for much of the fight and even outfought him at times, and seemed a clear winner, but somehow two of the three myopic judges were overawed by the Chavez legend, or perhaps just by Don King, and made it a draw.

Two defenses later, Whitaker fought a return with McGirt and this time won with plenty to spare. After outclassing the far bigger, 53-1 Julio Cesar Vasquez (who, six months earlier had beaten Winky Wright), Whitaker returned to welterweight. Following two points wins over the previously unbeaten Wildredo Rivera, the 33-year-old defended against the 20-0 Disosbelys Hurtado. Out of shape and past his best, Whitaker was dropped twice and behind on points going into the penultimate round, but landed 10 devastating left hooks to win on a rare knockout.

Next came the prime Oscar De La Hoya, who was a firm favorite over the aging champion. But Whitaker's twisting and turning, his bodyattack and his jab frustrated "The Golden Boy," who was knocked down in the ninth. Some at ringside felt Sweet Pea deserved it, but the wide, unanimous decision went the other way, and Whitaker's four years as titleholder came to an end.

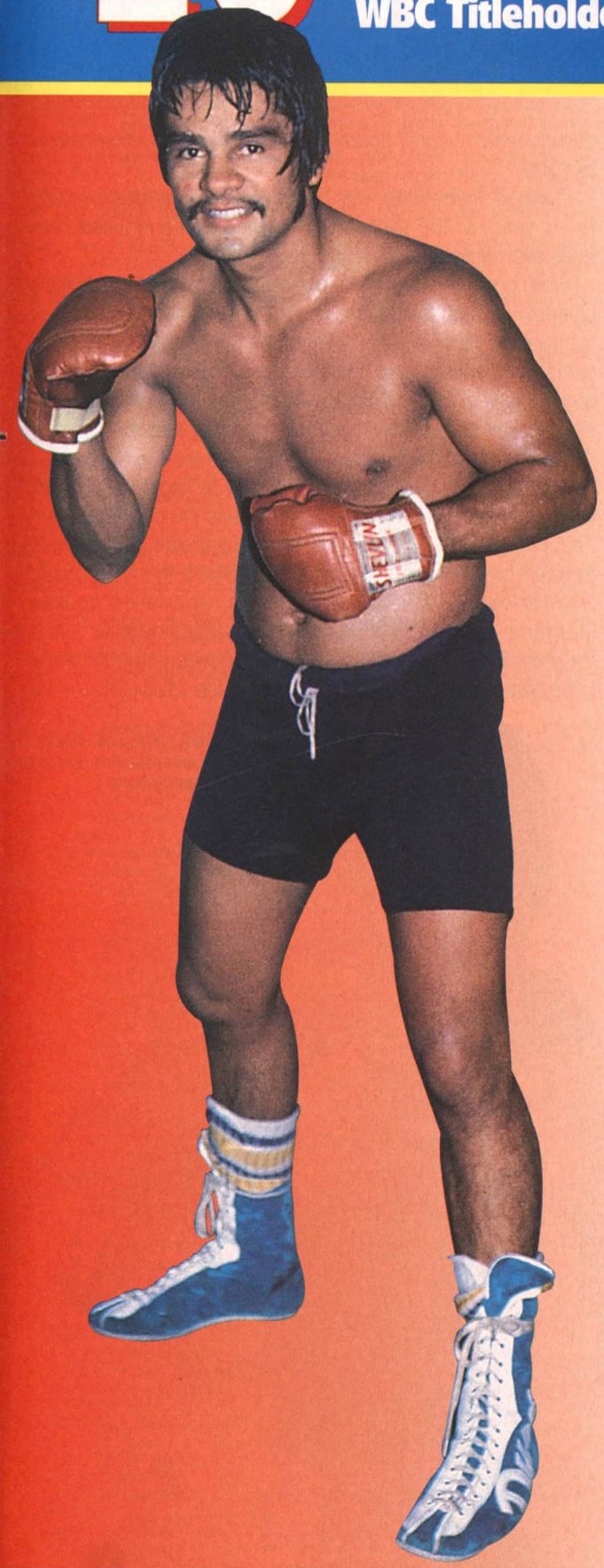
A win over Andrei Pestriaev six months later was changed to a no-contest after Whitaker tested positive for cocaine. He was out for 16 months before his 15th and final fight at welterweight, against Felix Trinidad. His jaw was broken by the Puerto Rican's elbow in the sixth round, but he held on to lose on points—the first clear loss in his career. He retired and a comeback two years later was aborted when a broken clavicle ruled him out of his junior middleweight fight with journeyman Carlos Bojorquez.

Overall, Whitaker's long reign, his performances against men of the quality such as McGirt, Chavez, Hurtado, and De La Hoya, and sheer defensive brilliance he was still capable of displaying, earn him a place among the top 20.

20 ROBERTO DURAN

103-16 (70)

WBC Titleholder 1980



No question, "Hands Of Stone" was one of the three greatest lightweights of all-time, but once he moved up, he became an enigma. At junior middleweight, the man who demolished Davey Moore and Pipino Cuevas was demolished by Tommy Hearns and outboxed by Wilfred Benitez and Kirkland Laing. At middleweight, he was amazing against Iran Barkley and unexpectedly good against Marvin Hagler, but dire against William Joppy. At super middleweight, he split a pair with Jorge Castro, but that was it.

It was at welterweight that the gap between the best and worst of Duran was starkest—particularly since it was expressed against the same man. The relentless, impeccably conditioned, highly skilled Duran who won a unanimous decision over the near-peak Sugar Ray Leonard would have beaten most of the men above him on this list—and the same could be said of the version who totally dominated Carlos Palomino.

But Duran was a disgrace in the return with the infamous "No Mas" Leonard fight. He spent most of the five months between the fights celebrating and was in no shape to face a highly focused Leonard. When Sugar Ray avoided repeating the mistake of going toe-to-toe with the best in-fighter in boxing, Duran ran out of ideas. Going into the eighth round, he was behind on points, but, more to the point, he was being humiliated. So instead of sucking it up, he just gave up, waved his hand and quit.

This final welterweight outing counts a good deal against Duran. So does the fact that his entire welterweight run lasted a total of eight bouts. That said, it also has to be taken into account that seven of those eight revealed an outstanding 147-pounder.

After 6½ years as world lightweight champion, he skipped junior welterweight, knocked out Monroe Brooks in eight, and then won an easy decision over leading contender Jimmy Heair. This set him up for a major fight with the highly regarded former WBC titleholder, Palomino, who was having his first fight since losing his title via split decision to Wilfred Benitez. Duran was all over him, winning nine out of 10 rounds.

He bided his time with three more wins before challenging Leonard, who was the bookie's favorite. Duran's prefight tactic of taunting Sugar Ray and questioning his machismo worked well, drawing the American into a punch-up. Both men showed immense resilience, power, boxing skill, and courage, but at the end of 15 rounds, after one of the greatest welterweight fights of all-time, each of the judges and everyone else at ringside agreed that Duran had shaded it.

That's enough to make our top 20, but when balanced against "No Mas," only just.

FUTURE CANDIDATES

The welterweight division as strong today as at any time in its 120-year gloved history. Put differently, its current stars would be at home in any era and there are more within range of the top-20 than ever before.

Once scores are settled between Floyd Mayweather and Ricky Hatton (81-0 between them), and Shane Mosley against Miguel Cotto, we can expect Oscar De La Hoya to step into the breach once again. Mayweather, Hatton, and Cotto have a way to go before making our list (just seven welterweight fights among them), but "Sugar Shane" and "The Golden Boy" are already in contention.

The 36-year-old Mosley was unbeaten at lightweight, but is a more ambiguous 9-2 at welter, so far. The highlight was his victory over De La Hoya in 2000, but his record is marred by two points defeat against Vernon Forrest. However, if he can get past Cotto, his chances improve.

In 12 of his welterweight outings to date, Oscar unified the WBC and IBF titles, stopped Julio Cesar Chavez, won disputed decisions over Ike Quartey and Pernell Whitaker, conceded a split decision against Mosley, and lost an extremely questionable majority nod against Felix Trinidad. He needs a bit more.

Trinidad, incidentally, has already earned his spurs—ruling for six years as IBF titlist, with 16 defenses that included decisions over Whitaker and De La Hoya.

Hoping to join them is another outstanding veteran. Ghana's Quartey, 38, last fought Winky Wright at middleweight, but is planning a return to welter, where his only defeat in 36 fights came via disputed split decision against De La Hoya—after nearly five years as WBA titlist. He may be joined by Uganda's Kassim Ouma, a natural welterweight who last ran Jermain Taylor close at middleweight.

With all of this veteran action, it's easy to forget the younger men hoping to take over. Top of that pile is the busy-fisted 6'1" Paul Williams, 26, who won the WBO trinket with a unanimous decision over Antonio Margarito. Then there's the huge-hitting, 27-year-old IBF titlist Kermit Cintron, who failed against Margarito in 2005, but has improved considerably since Emanuel Steward took over his training. Coming up from below is the heavy-handed, 24-year-old Andre Berto, 20-0 (17). ■

De La Hoya (left) and Mosley (far left) are contenders as future all-time greats

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Is this any way to treat a hot prospect? Berto eats a punch from Cosme Rivera during their July 2007 bout in which Berto was knocked down before prevailing via unanimous 10-round decision.

A Prospect's BIGGEST QUESTION MARK

AS THE CHIN GOES, SO DOES BERTO

By Don Stewart

Andre Berto is his own worst critic. After veteran Cosme Rivera dropped him for the first time as a pro back in June, Berto beat himself up further by watching the replay countless times. The mistake bothered him to the point that he was losing sleep over it, and when it came time to prepare for his next test, Berto decided to train away from home to limit his distractions.

Most observers were impressed by the result, a steady pounding of David Estrada in September that finally ended with the tough former contender out on his feet in the 11th round. "Every time I watch the fight," Berto said, "I get irritated at times with things I didn't do, punches I got hit with that I

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Berto blasts David Estrada into the ropes en route to an 11th-round TKO and his 20th consecutive victory as a pro. But before stopping his capable opponent, Berto was forced to take almost 300 punches, which does not bode well for his future in the talent-stacked welterweight division, which features many fighters who hit harder than Estrada.

shouldn't have gotten hit with. But all in all, it was a good night of boxing."

Berto, 20-0 (17), is tougher on himself than most of the fight media, which have been persistent in crowning him "The Next Big Thing." The 24-year-old might end up achieving the superstardom many foresee—he certainly has the talent, the connections, and the right attitude—but Rivera and Estrada revealed an unfinished product that needs more testing.

Against Rivera, Berto was dominating to the point that he became careless late in the sixth round, when the savvy Mexican sent him down with a perfectly timed left hook to the chin. He got up and reasserted himself on his way to winning a comfortable 10-round decision, but the knockdown was alarming considering Rivera has just 21 knockouts in 43 pro fights.

Berto said his performance against Rivera was hindered by personal problems that distracted him in training. He didn't wish to elaborate, but reportedly his amateur coach had recently died, and three friends were in serious legal trouble. "I actually was trying to finish the fight as soon as possible so I could go back home," Berto said. For Estrada, he went away to train for the first time, choosing Miami Beach as his destination.

While Berto showed a better jab and more poise against Estrada, 21-4 (12), he ate an alarming number of punches. CompuBox had Estrada landing 283 of his 731 blows for a 39 percent clip. That percentage was much higher in the early going, before Berto's constant punishment began slowing Estrada down. Fortunately for the '04 Olympian, Estrada isn't a powerpuncher, though Berto was stunned in the opening round by a short left hook, and he left the ring with a swollen right eye.

With the exception of that first round, Berto dominated what turned out to be a fun fight against an opponent who gave former champ Shane Mosley problems in '05 and nearly stopped current beltholder Kermit Cintron the following year. "For a young kid coming up, I believe that's all

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Estrada drives a left hook into Berto's face during the early going of their September bout on the Kelly Pavlik-Jermain Taylor card in Atlantic City. Luckily for Berto, his adversary was not a big puncher.

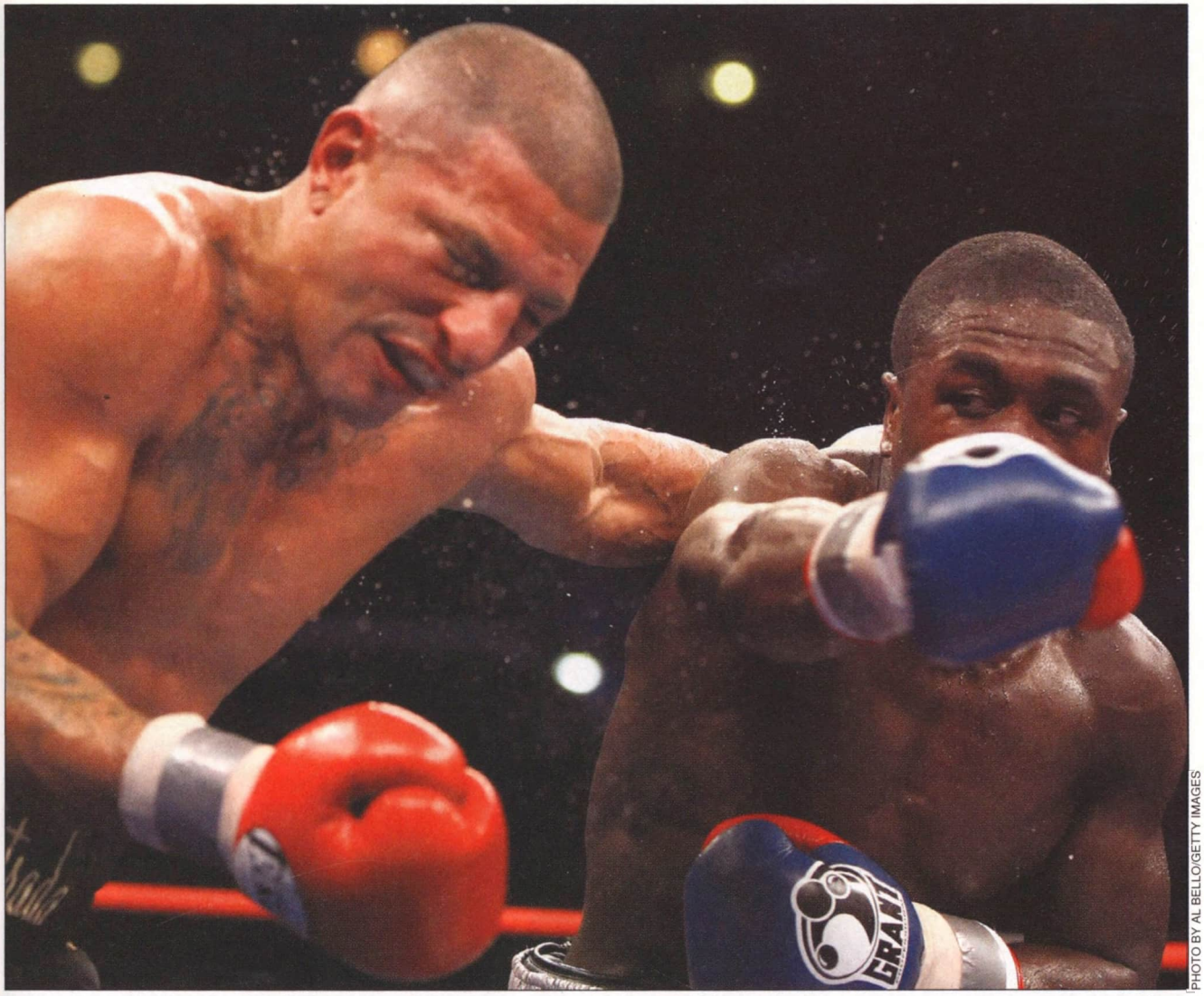


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Berto fires a right at Estrada, but may have to temper his aggressive style if he's going to shore up his defenses. The trouble is that it was Berto's attacking style that first brought him to the attention of the fans and helped garner plenty of TV time.

right," Berto said with a disarming chuckle.

It's all right, but if he wants to beat the elite of boxing's deepest division, it will have to be better. If Rivera and Estrada could rock Berto, imagine what heavier hitters such as Mosley, Cintron, Miguel Cotto, and Antonio Margarito could do?

Berto, who was dropped three times as an amateur, and longtime trainer Tony Morgan need to work on avoiding shots. To their credit, Berto appeared to be more defensive-minded at times against Estrada, whom Berto often tagged while moving backward. At the same time, that increased defensive focus seemed to make Berto a bit less willing to take the chances that could have ended the fight earlier.

Either the aggressive Berto is developing into more of a true boxer-puncher, or his fears about his chin have shaken his confidence. It's likely the former, which means Berto is at a critical point in his development.

With those questions about his chin, Berto can't afford to be a brawler, which seems to be his natural inclination. But that doesn't mean he has to morph into an unwatchable boxer, a la Andre Dirrell, either. With his fast hands and superb footwork, Berto could be more of an aggressive counterpuncher off his jab, the type that forces opponents to make mistakes. That way, Berto wouldn't be taking the kinds of risks that go with trading on the inside. Then, maybe, Berto's chin will improve as he matures, and he can gradually go back to that exciting give-and-take type of approach.

"I love his style," said Larry Merchant, who called the Estrada fight for HBO. "It's a crowd-pleasing style. But it's a difficult style to get to the top with. We're talking about a Cotto-like style. That kind of aggressive, relentless style is always going to be tested, is always going to leave a fighter vulnerable. So then the questions become: What is his resilience and his ability to keep going forward? So far, so good. I think he's got a little time, another four or five fights to really see how he stands against a better class of fighters."

Beating Estrada positioned Berto to become the mandatory challenger for two welterweight belts, but promoter Lou DiBella admits it would be premature to match his fighter against one of the top four or five names in the division. DiBella's primary concern is a lack of rounds, the result of Berto blowing through his first 17 opponents like Chef

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

On the plus side is the undeniable fact that Berto has, so far, always overcome adversity and blasted his way to victory. While Estrada certainly gave him a competitive match, in the end he was overwhelmed by Berto's superior firepower.

Ramsay through a poorly run kitchen.

"He's the best American prospect, but I don't think he's ready immediately for a Cotto, a Mosley, or even a Zab Judah yet," DiBella said. "I think the Estrada fight was a great TV fight and a great learning fight, but he's a 24-year-old kid and I think he needs a little more seasoning before he steps up to the top level. I think he can get in the ring and fight with any of those guys. I just don't think we've given him the rounds and the experience necessary to succeed to the extent that he's capable of succeeding at the highest level."

DiBella believes Berto needs two more good fights. As this issue went to press, he was talking to HBO about a January bout. DiBella said he doesn't plan to scale back the level of opposition, despite the chinks in the armor that were revealed against Estrada and Rivera. "He'll be fighting only top-10 guys," DiBella said. How much power they'll pack remains to be seen.

For his part, Berto is willing to admit his mistakes and learn from them. When he watches the tape of the Estrada fight, Berto sees times when he needed to bend his knees more. Or work the body. Or block punches.

"I believe I'm almost there," said Berto, who comes off as intelligent and personable. "I believe my offense is on point. I still just need to tweak some things. But I believe I'm pretty much there."

The buzz about Berto has stemmed from an outstanding amateur career that was followed by plenty of TV exposure as a pro prospect. He also has an intriguing back-story that's been well publicized.

The son of Haitian immigrants and one of seven children, Andre grew up in a rough Winter Haven, Florida, neighborhood. His father, Dieuseul Berto, was a martial arts competitor who was big on hard work and discipline. While the rest of his family followed in the father's path, Andre began boxing at age eight. The sport and his demanding father kept him away from trouble.

Andre's older brother, Edson Berto, is an MMA combatant who briefly held the Real Fighting Association lightweight title in 2007. So, naturally, the question Andre gets most frequently is if he has

any interest in crossing over. Thankfully for boxing fans, that doesn't seem to be the case.

"I get asked about it *all the time*," he said. "I get asked if I want to step into that realm. Do I like it? Do I practice with my family and brother at home? I get all kinds of questions, man. UFC, they're doing their thing right now. They already have a Berto trying to take over that side."

This Berto took bronze at the '03 World Championships, was a three-time U.S. Championships medalist, and twice won the National Golden Gloves and the PAL Nationals. But in the opening round of the '04 U.S. Olympic Trials, he was disqualified for tossing Juan McPherson to the floor in a fight Berto was winning deep into the fourth round. A grievance committee reinstated him, only to have a second committee reverse that decision.

So Dieuseul took the unique step of contacting Haitian officials to allow his son, who has dual citizenship but had never been to his parents' country, to represent the Caribbean nation at the Athens Games. Andre became Haiti's one-man boxing team, only to lose in the first round, 36-34, to France's Xavier Noel.

Berto signed with DiBella and turned pro in December 2004 with a third-round stoppage of Michael Robinson on the Jermain Taylor-William Joppy undercard. He blew out seven opponents within three minutes, averaging just 2.7 rounds per fight in his first 17 outings. Then Berto went seven rounds with the durable Martinus Clay before passing tests with less-than-perfect scores against Rivera and Estrada.

"I like him," Merchant said. "I think he's a serious prospect. I think he's a bright kid who's using this stage of his career to try to find out who he is and where he is and what he has to do to get to the highest level. I wouldn't put him in the category of can't miss. But he's strong, and outside the ring I see him as being a very interesting and intelligent kid. He's a got a shot."

If he's moved right. For now, Berto probably would be best served developing his skills against the likes of fringe contenders Mark Suarez and Delvin Rodriguez, respectable opponents with decent power who would come to fight.

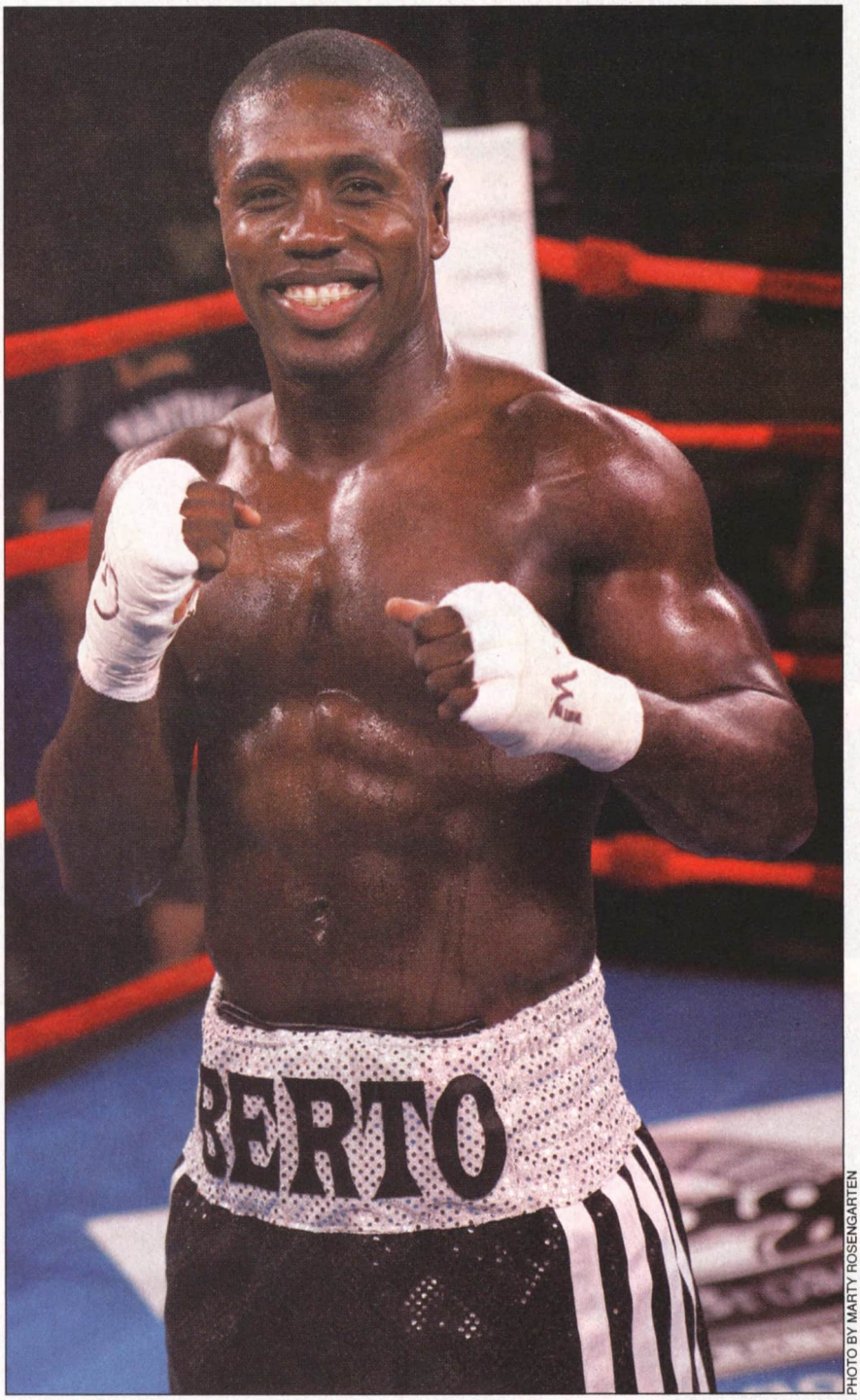


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Berto certainly looks the part of a future champion, and has the connections to take him to a title fight. Nonetheless, promoter Lou DiBella agrees his 24-year-old charge needs more seasoning before stepping up to fight the welterweight elite.

"I think he has the potential to be one of the best fighters in the world for a long time," DiBella said. "I don't think this is just an ordinary prospect; I think this is a super prospect. But I think you also have to be intelligent in the development process. I'm not running around right now scampering for the Cotto-Mosley winner."

Not yet, anyway. The Rivera and Estrada fights were a reminder that Berto is still young, still relatively inexperienced as a pro. He might very well be special, but Berto will need some added maturity and several more sleepless nights dissecting film to become the fighter some feel he is he capable of becoming. ■

Don Stewart covers boxing for the Reading (Pennsylvania) Eagle and is a regular contributor to THE RING.

Witter cracks Vivian Harris with a left hook en route to a seventh-round knockout (below). But despite Witter's outstanding performance and his status as THE RING*'s number-one junior welterweight contender, champion Ricky Hatton (opposing page) refuses to give his fellow Englishman a title shot.*

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

WBC Titleholder JUNIOR WITTER

The ONE Man HATTON Refuses To FIGHT

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

By Brian Doogan

The old gym on Wincobank Road remains a beacon for "waifs and strays" nine years after Prince Naseem Hamed last darkened its doors. Prospects, problem kids, college graduates, and contenders all mix easily and work hard inside its four walls. In one corner, on a stool by the side of the

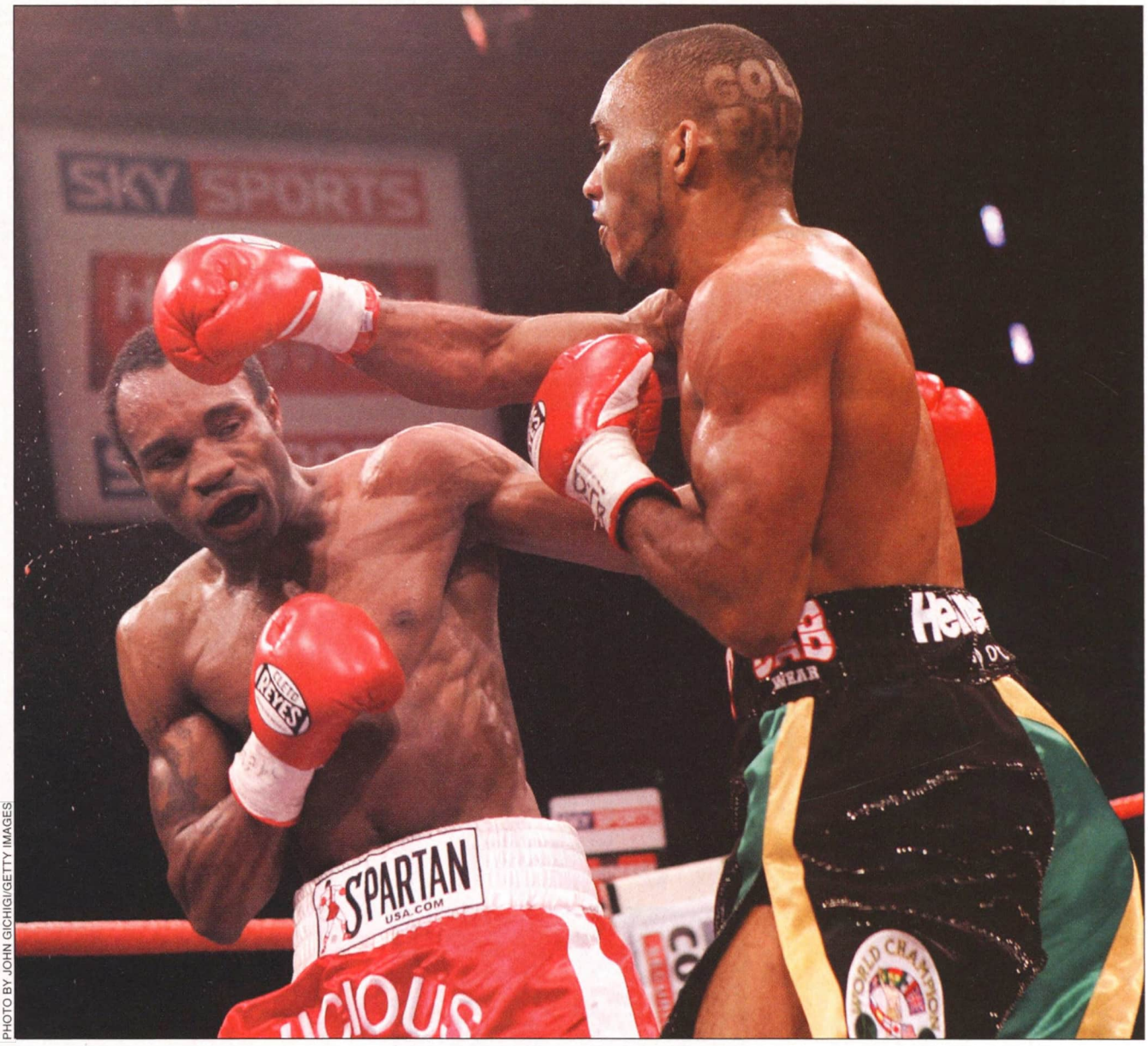


PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Many were surprised by the way Witter handled Harris with comparative ease for his second defense of the WBC 140-pound strap. Witter has been criticized for posing instead of punching in some of his past performances, but he unloaded his big guns against Harris.

ring, Brendan Ingle can be heard calling out, "Time ... change over ... away you go ... no hitting to the face accidentally on purpose, because I'm watching what you're doing," while six boxers or more engage in sparring inside the ropes, no punches to the head permitted. Signs posted on the walls spell out the dangers—"Boxing Can Seriously Damage Your Health"—but, invariably, the atmosphere is almost joyful.

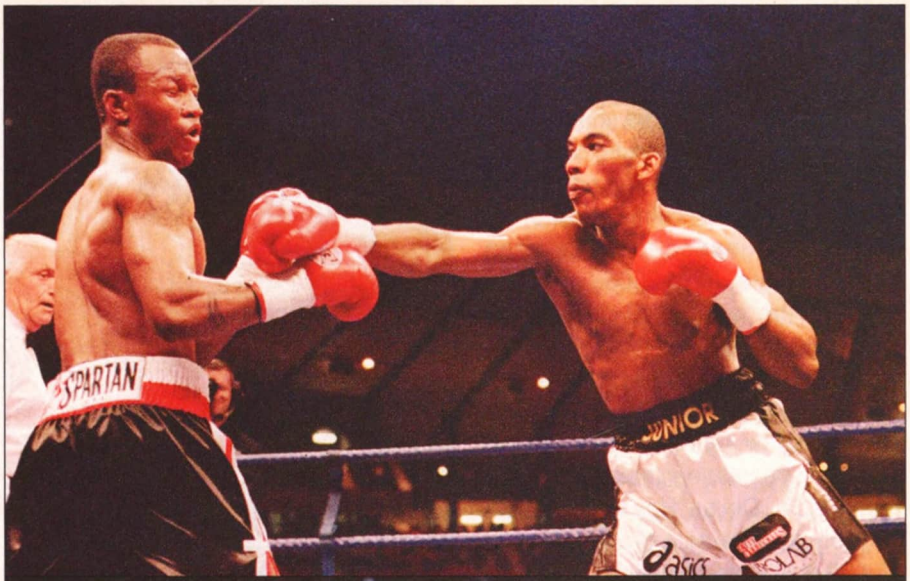
For the past 11 years, Junior Witter has boxed quietly in the shadows of this Sheffield sanctuary in the north of England, 50 miles from his home city of Bradford. Occasionally, he has had the opportunity to become a more lauded performer, following in the footsteps of Hamed, Herol Graham, the one-time middleweight contender, and Johnny Nelson, who held the WBO cruiserweight belt for seven years, but, for some observers, never quite managed to shake off the reputation of a latent pacifist.

Witter has also had problems with people's perceptions. In June 2000, on the undercard of Mike Tyson's 30-second destruction of Lou Savarese, Witter went the distance with Zab Judah in a challenge for the New Yorker's IBF junior welterweight title. Unfairly, the Englishman was characterized as a runner and a spoiler, and despite subsequent evidence to the contrary, the charges stuck. It was six long years before he managed to secure a title shot again, and even his winning of the WBC version of the 140-pound title against DeMarcus Corley seemed only begrudgingly to gain acknowledgement.

"Witter has impressive hand speed and substantial power, and there is notable cleverness in his boxing, though his celebrated fondness for switching freely between the orthodox stance and southpaw is a less reliable advantage than he imagines," wrote Hugh McIlvanney, the doyen of

British sportswriters, in the *Sunday Times*. "But it is the peculiarity of his more self-indulgent antics, which often involve tiresome posing, that can leave spectators feeling they would rather be somewhere else. He dealt easily, sometimes punishingly with Corley, a southpaw with the resigned demeanor of the sparring partner he has recently been, but the winner's performance rarely threatened to be dramatically memorable. One of its abiding images will be the occasion in the seventh round when both boxers stood statue-still for so long that ringsiders must have been tempted to paint them silver and cart them off to join the buskers in [London's] Covent Garden."

But Witter has persevered and, finally, he achieved widespread acceptance of his worth with a dominating and stunningly convincing performance against Vivian Harris, whom he knocked out in the seventh round on September 7 at the Doncaster Dome. He combined power and authority with the elusiveness that is his forte, and the only prolonged posing in which he indulged was done with a smile for the ringside photographers when the brutal business was over. He could afford to smile, for after years of operating on the periphery of his profession he had delivered on center stage. Harris had been ranked number two in THE RING's junior welterweight ratings, and Witter's impressive victory consolidated his position as the top contender for Ricky Hatton's championship belt. Only time will tell if he managed to advance his cause, but, unquestionably, he deserves a shot at his compatriot, for he has earned it. In 21 bouts since he suffered the only defeat of his career, to Judah, he has accumulated 21 straight wins,



PHOTOS BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Witter's first big fight came in 2000 when he took on then-IBF junior welter titleholder Zab Judah (top) on nine days' notice on the Mike Tyson-Lou Savarese card in Glasgow, Scotland. Although Witter lost a 12-round decision, he gave a very good account of himself. Ironically, today Witter has the WBC title, while Judah is beltless.

17 by stoppage. The 33-year-old's credentials are incontrovertible.

Hatton, however, believes that he has bigger fish to fry. His challenge of Floyd Mayweather, boxing's pound-for-pound king, for the world welterweight title, is the culmination of an assault on America that has been ongoing since June 2005, when he wrested the world 140-pound title from Kostya Tszyu and five months later, when he defended against Colombia's Carlos Maussa. Win, lose, or draw against Mayweather, there is speculation that Hatton will face Oscar De La Hoya next year, possibly in front of a crowd of up to 80,000 at Wembley stadium.

"It's never out of the question," De La Hoya said in September on the London leg of the Mayweather-Hatton promotional tour. "If I had beaten Floyd, I believe it would be me fighting Ricky now and, let's put it this way, I'm crossing my fingers that Ricky wins [against Mayweather]. My plan is to fight three times next year, so [De La Hoya-Hatton] is a possibility. Absolutely."

Which, of course, would supersede a challenge by Witter. Hatton informed THE RING that he will determine his future status immediately following his highly anticipated showdown with Mayweather, deciding then if he should continue to campaign at welterweight, where more lucrative matches await, or return to the 140-pound class in which he dismantled his previous top contender, Jose Luis Castillo, in four rounds in June. Even if he were to choose the latter option, there is no guarantee that he would face Witter, for in Hatton's mind he is an unnecessary diversion. All the enmity that exists between the pair is reason to isolate him, as far as Hatton is concerned, rather than to grant Witter the encounter he craves.

Their cold war dates back to October 2000, when Witter crashed a live TV interview by Hatton after his British title-winning effort over Jon Thaxton, then one of Witter's stablemates. At one point it was written into a contract with Frank Warren, Hatton's former promoter, that he would fight Witter and, suddenly, the walls of Hatton's gym in Denton, on the outskirts of Manchester, were plastered with grotesque caricatures of Witter, each one containing a caustic caption not repeatable in this magazine. But the bitterest domestic rivalry since Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn twice went to war in the early-1990s has still not ended in a fight.

"He probably regrets [crashing the interview] to this day," Hatton recently told Ron Lewis of *The Times* in an unusually vitriolic attack, which emphasized his deep-seated loathing of Witter. "Frank Warren said that further down the road you'll fight for big money, but he built me up and didn't build up Junior. I was fighting Freddie Pendleton and Vince Phillips, and Junior was still fighting six-rounders ... Witter has won the British title, the European title, the Commonwealth title, the WBC title, and, ultimately, he's had a great career. But the only way he's going to make any considerable money is by fighting me. I've enjoyed seeing him squirm, fighting nobodies and getting no money."

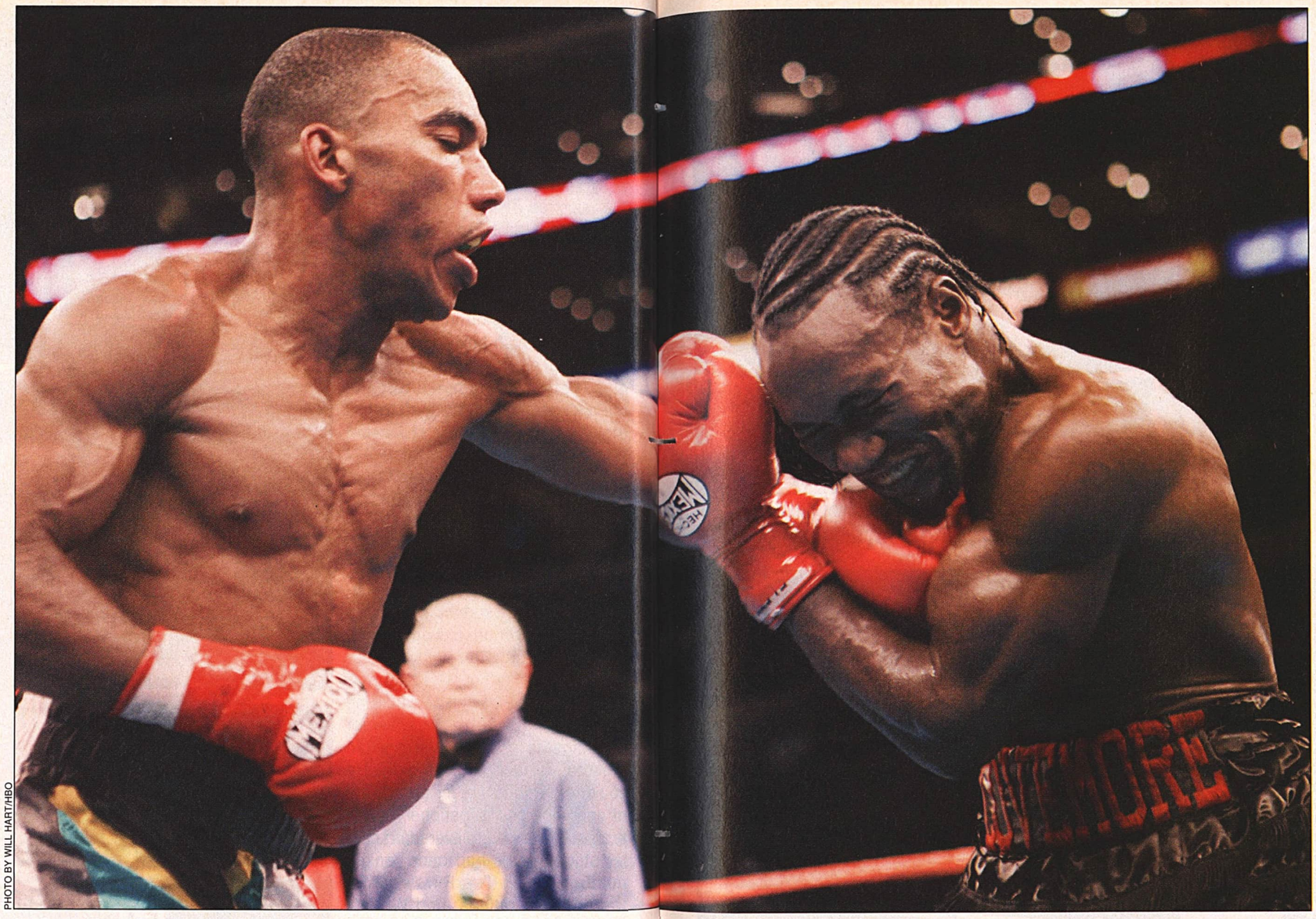


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

In Witter's lone U.S. appearance to date, he won a hard-fought, 12-round decision over tough contender Lovemore Ndou in Los Angeles in February 2005. At the time, Witter held the British and European 140-pound titles, which he has since relinquished.

If they were to meet in the street, Hatton would not pass him the time of day, yet Witter, who lacks the natural charisma of the 28-year-old "Hitman," is a straightforward, down-to-earth personality. The very antithesis of the narcissistic Naz, maybe it is his placid persona that has hurt him most in an industry that rewards outlandishness and controversy.

"I was a bit rough as a kid and got myself into scrapes, as young boys do," confessed Witter, who is trained by Ingle and his sons, John and Dominic. "But a friend who used to box told me once that in boxing gyms you can fight and you don't get into trouble for it. That sounded good to me. Boxing helped me to control my anger and kept me out of trouble with the law. It taught me respect and discipline, and I've always tried to behave in the proper way. Perhaps if I did behave like Zab Judah, mouthing off and getting into trouble, I might have been given more credit for what I've achieved in my career. But that's not me."

For too many years Witter was ostracized because of the unorthodoxy he showed in frustrating Judah. It was not a made-for-TV fight. But he had only been boxing professionally for three years and accepted the fight on nine days' notice, and the onus, he maintains, ought to have been on Judah, the seasoned pro, to produce fireworks. Looking back, Witter would have done things differently, but he is proud of the character he showed.

"People were betting on me losing that fight inside two rounds, so I believe I did really well to go the distance with Judah, who was rated one of the best fighters pound-for-pound at that time," he reflected. "I had nine days to prepare for the fight, but I believed in myself, maybe not that I could win, but, certainly that I could do myself justice and I knew I just wouldn't cave in. It wasn't the best thing that could have happened for my career and it was a turning point for the worst, but I just had to get on with it, which is what I did for the next several years when no one seemed to be paying any attention. That was unfair and so was the criticism I got for the Judah fight. At times I did despair of my situation and it was tough to keep motivated and keep going. But the alternative didn't appeal to me either, so I just knuckled down and got on with it."

Witter's breakthrough came in a WBC title eliminator in February 2005 in Los Angeles against tough Australia-based South African Lovemore Ndou, whom he defeated on points. It was close and competitive, and Witter showed resilience and a firm resolve. When the moment came for him to challenge for the belt vacated by Mayweather, who stepped up in weight to challenge Carlos Baldomir, he was ready.

"There was no way I was going to be denied by Corley," he declared. "Mentally and physically, I was too strong for him and I won the vast majority of the 12 rounds. Going the distance has never been a problem for me because I'm always in shape. Johnny Nelson (recently retired) basically lived in the gym and that's

the ethos I follow."

Hatton's ethos is a little different, acquainted as he is with Mr. Guinness and Mr. Dom Perignon. Between fights he indulges himself in the treats he is denied once training commences, which is reflected in his more extrovert and happy-go-lucky personality. There is no fight that Witter desires more, but he is realistic about the likelihood of it ever happening.

"If it happens, great. If it doesn't, then it will only be because he's scared to fight me and that's the truth of why it hasn't happened all these years," Witter insisted. "I've always been willing to fight Ricky and we're both at the top of the division, so why hasn't it happened? It's a natural, just like Eubank and Benn. Imagine if one of them had said, 'Nah, I just don't want to fight you.' The public would have ridiculed

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

DeMarcus Corley absorbs a flush left from Witter in their September 2006 fight for the vacant WBC trinket, which Witter won via 12-round decision. But even capturing a title didn't turn Witter into a star in Britain, where Hatton, Joe Calzaghe, and Amir Khan rule the box office.

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Witter "The Hitter" certainly lived up to his nickname against Harris, who was counted out by referee Daniel Van de Wiele at the 1:00 mark of the seventh round. It was Witter's 21st consecutive victory, and 17 of those have come inside of the distance.

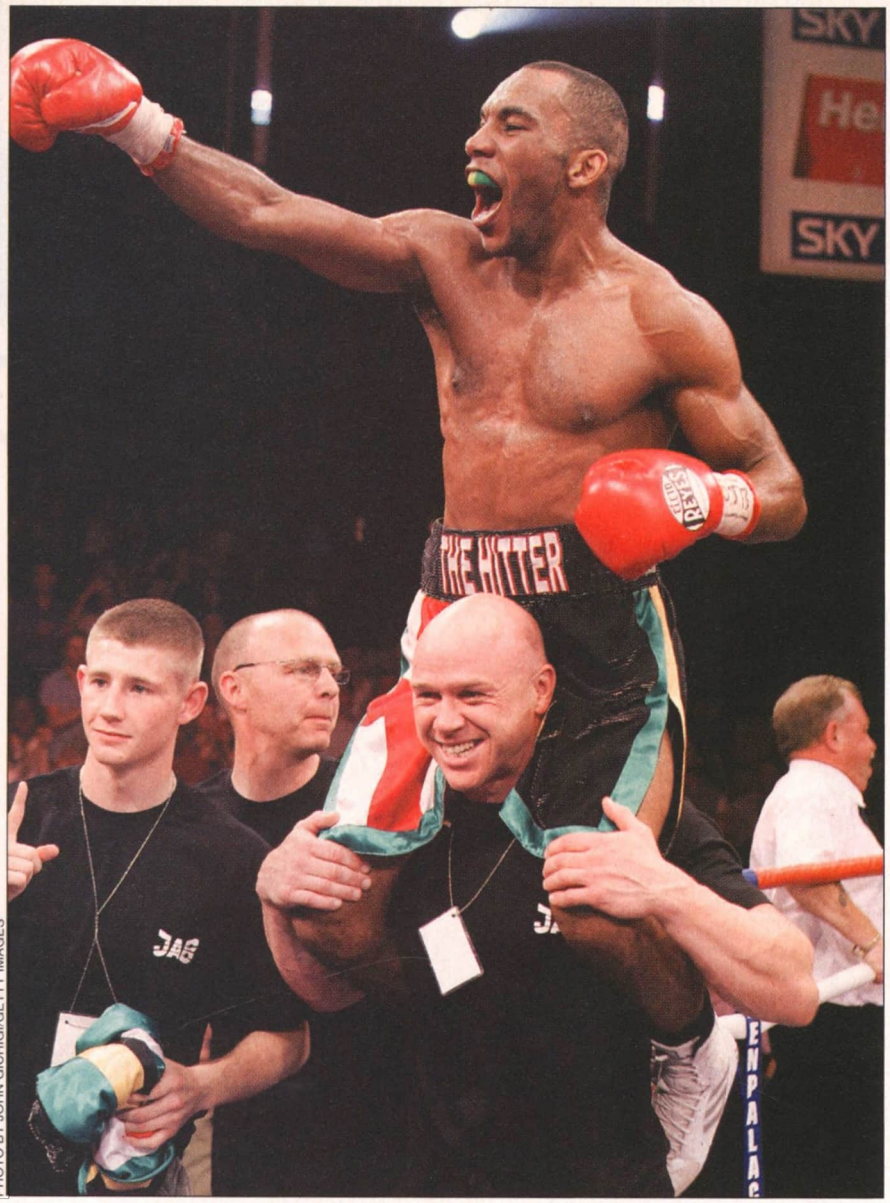


PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

"Hey, Ricky, want some of this?" Witter celebrates his kayo of Harris and challenges Hatton anew. Still, Witter is realistic and realizes that there's a chance his dream fight will never happen.

them. Yet Ricky seems to get away with it even though we could fill a football ground.

"I don't see Ricky beating Mayweather or even giving him any problems. Mayweather's too good, too skilled, and too fast. He will throw so many punches that Ricky won't know what to do. That's the way I see it. Ricky's expecting to bully Mayweather, but, with his speed, Mayweather should win on points or even by late-round stoppage. I don't know what Ricky will do when he's gone away and had time to reflect, but I'll still be here, ready to fight. If it doesn't happen, my promoter [Mick Hennessy] has been talking to IBF titleholder Paulie Malignaggi and his people about a unification fight (which, potentially, could be for THE RING's vacant belt, if Hatton were not to return to junior welterweight). It's not something I'm going to get too cut up about. Of course, I wanted to meet Ricky in a defining fight, but it's up to him. Maybe we'll see what he's made of."

If persistence and his most recent performance against Harris are anything to go by, there is no doubt that Witter, 36-1-2 (21), is made of the right stuff. ■

Brian Doogan is THE RING's European correspondent.

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POSTPONED!

The Ugliest Word In Boxing

By Don Stradley

Four fights of major interest were canceled or postponed this fall due to injuries. The most recent involved Oleg Maskaev postponing his October bout with Sam Peter. Apparently Maskaev came back from a run complaining of back pain. His doctor announced

Two major heavyweight fights were postponed recently due to back injuries suffered in training: First, Vitali Klitschko pulled out of his scheduled comeback fight with Jameel McCline (right), and then Oleg Maskaev withdrew from his match with Samuel Peter (far right). As is often the case, cynics have questioned the legitimacy of these injuries.

PHOTO BY LARS BARON/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Geraldine Liston reads the bad news that hubby Sonny's rematch with Muhammad Ali had been postponed because Ali has to undergo an emergency hernia operation. Liston supporters claim the ex-champ never regained his form due to the delay.

Maskaev had several herniated discs in his back, a couple of bulging discs, and a contusion on his ankle. Was Maskaev running, or was he giving Nicolay Valuev a piggyback ride?

Maskaev's bout was just the latest in what feels like an epidemic of cancellations. Vitali Klitschko's emergency back surgery stalled his comeback bout with Jameel McCline; Juan Manual Marquez postponed his fight with Rocky Juarez due to an infected hand; and the Fernando Vargas-Ricardo Mayorga bout was postponed after Vargas was diagnosed with anemia. What's next? Roy Jones catches the bird flue from his chickens? Hopefully, Ricky Hatton didn't come down with scurvy and his bout with Floyd Mayweather went off as planned.

At least these bouts were canceled far enough in advance that customers weren't left in the lurch, as they were in 2006 when the rubber match between Jose Luis Castillo and Diego Corrales was axed when Castillo failed to make the weight limit. There's no worse feeling than to buy your ticket and show up at the venue, only to learn that an undercard bout is now the main event. When you consider all of the possible things that can go wrong, it's no wonder that some of the biggest bouts in history tripped on their way to the opening bell.

Muhammad Ali's 1974 bout with George Foreman was postponed for weeks when Foreman was cut during training. Ali used the extra time wisely, absorbing the vibes of Africa and talking trash about George. This postponement was unique because the Ali and Foreman camps were stranded in Zaire for the duration. Ali's trainer, Angelo Dundee, said he grew so bored that he was teaching the lizards how to do pushups.

"The Rumble In The Jungle" wasn't the first postponed bout in Ali's colorful career. His 1965 rematch with Sonny Liston was all set to go when Ali needed emergency hernia surgery. Liston's supporters maintained that the postponement cost Liston immensely; he'd been in perfect shape when the can-

cellation was announced and never regained his peak condition for the rescheduled date. It's a romantic notion, one that Liston's admirers cling to, but Ali had Liston's number regardless of where or when they fought. Still, many believe the postponements of certain bouts have affected the outcomes.

For instance, many of Mike Tyson's supporters believe he would have beaten Evander Holyfield when they were originally scheduled to fight in November 1991. Unfortunately, Tyson found himself in the middle of a controversial rape trial and eventual prison sentence. Tyson and Holyfield wouldn't fight until November 1997. The six-year delay may have hurt Tyson, but just like Ali and Liston, it's probably also true that Holyfield could beat Tyson regardless of the year.

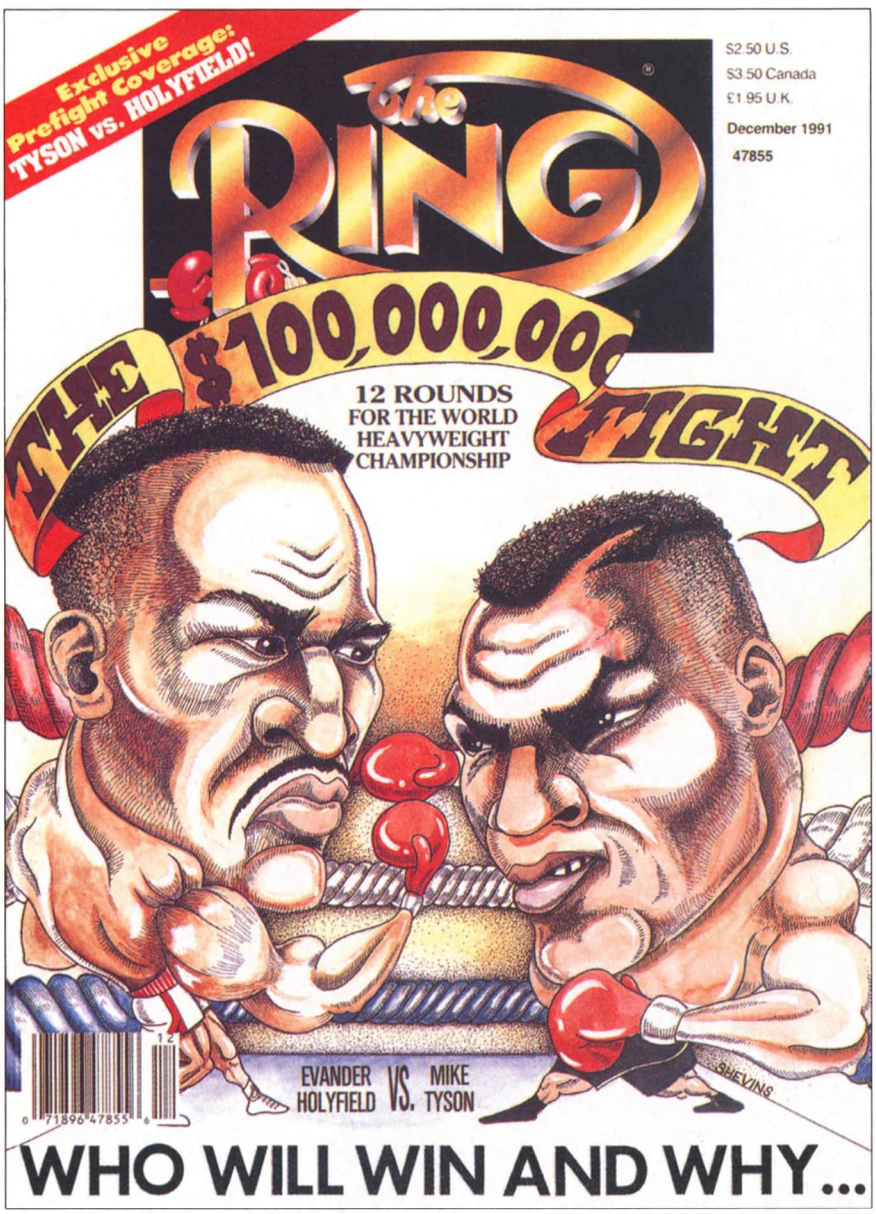
Many of Tyson's fights were postponed, even when he was in his prime, usually because of mysterious injuries and sudden ailments. We took Tyson at his word, but years later, Kevin Rooney, the chief trainer in Tyson's camp, said during an interview that if a fighter didn't look good in training that it was perfectly within reason to make up a phony illness and postpone the fight. Rooney wasn't referring directly to Tyson, but it makes one wonder how many of Tyson's illnesses and injuries were legit.

Few remember that Marvin Hagler and Thomas Hearns were scheduled to fight three years before their April 1985 meeting. Their first bout was canceled because Hearns injured a finger in sparring. When the finger healed, Hearns decided to focus on the junior middleweights. Was the finger injury legit or did the Hearns camp realize the jump from 147 to 160 was too much too soon?

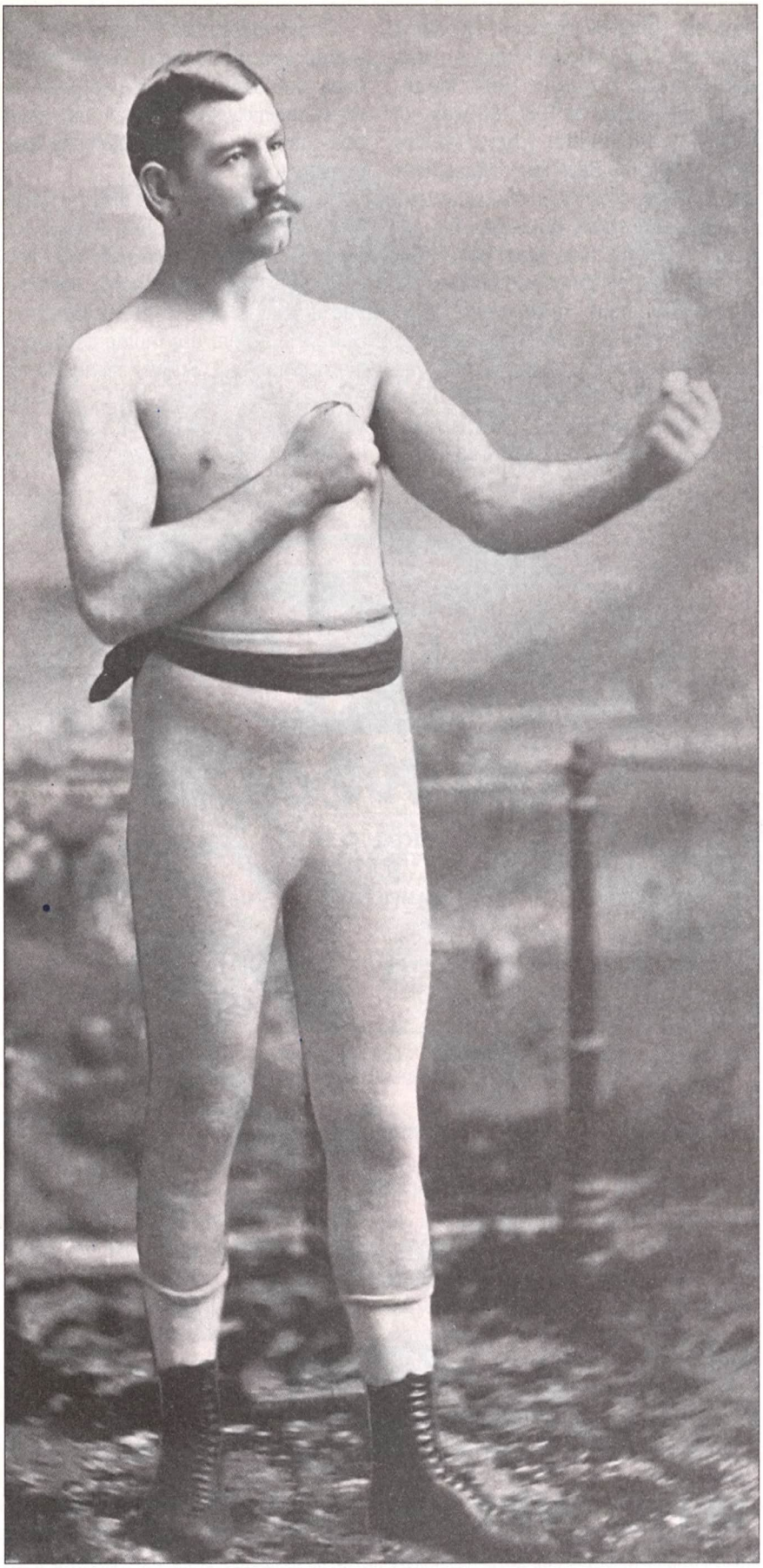
Hagler destroyed Hearns when they did eventually fight, and most assume he would have done so with even less trouble three years earlier, when Hearns was still a bony welterweight. But the Hearns of 1982-'83 was a jabber and a mover. Still smarting from his loss to Ray Leonard in 1981, Hearns started boxing the way he did in his amateur days, winning four of his next six fights by decision. He didn't rediscover his big punch until he kayoed Roberto Duran in 1984. Meanwhile, the Hagler of 1982-'83 was not the frenzied animal who attacked Hearns in 1985. Back then, Hagler was a methodical counterpuncher who took his time and slowly butchered his opponents. By the time they met in '85, however, the alchemy was in place for an explosive bout: Hagler was a bitter, attention-starved fighter who wanted to put on a memorable show; Hearns was confidant he could punch again after smashing Duran. Hence, the 1985 battle was destined to be a great one.

Could the clever Hearns of 1982 outbox the methodical Hagler? Probably not, but if the bout had gone off when originally scheduled, it may have been more of a boxing match and less of a firestorm.

An agonizing cancellation took place in 1884 when John L. Sullivan called off his bout with Charlie Mitchell. A rematch of an earlier battle, the bout had attracted over 5,000 to Madison Square Garden, but moments before the opening bell, Sullivan turned up in rumpled street clothes, looking as if he hadn't slept in a week. He apologized to the crowd, saying he was simply too



When Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson were originally scheduled to fight in 1992, The Ring published a cover story. But when Tyson was convicted of rape, the fight didn't take place until 1996, by which time Tyson had been released.



John L. Sullivan's 1884 bout with Charley Mitchell was scuttled because Sullivan had been drinking too heavily. They finally met in 1888 and fought to a 39-round draw in France.

drunk to fight. Mitchell had been rumored to be ill with malaria, which made Sullivan think the bout would be called off. He went on a massive drinking binge; by the time the malaria rumors had been cleared up, Sullivan had been boozing for 10 days. As the audience sat in disbelief, Sullivan tipped his hat and made off with his share of the gate money. Sullivan was popular, but after this stunt, he needed several months to get back in the public's good graces.

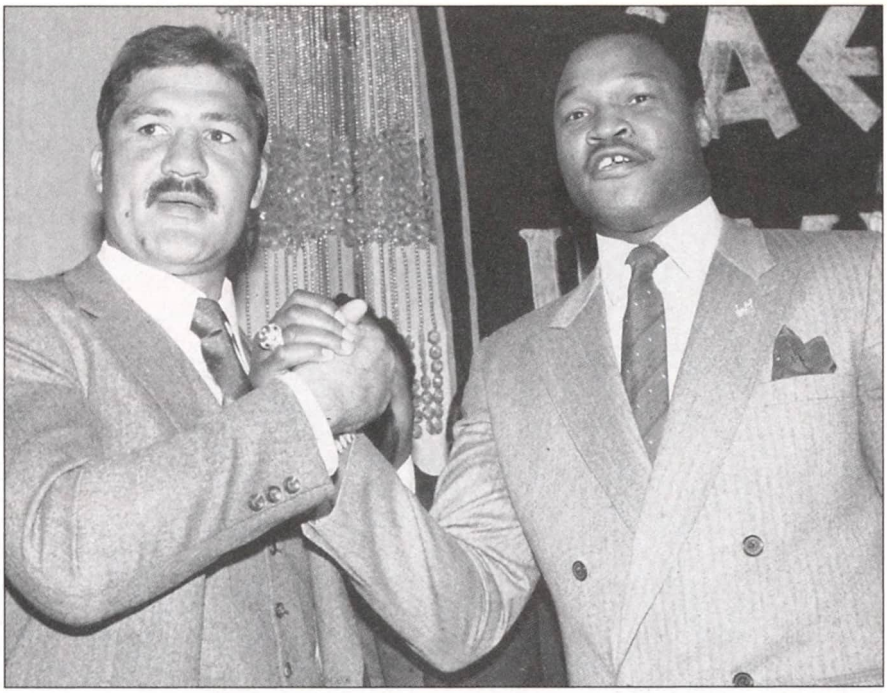
Nearly 100 years after Sullivan's debacle, politics, money, and red tape prevented fans from seeing Larry Holmes fight Gerrie Coetzee. The bout was scheduled for June 6, 1983, at Caesars Palace, with Holmes pitting his WBC heavyweight belt against Coetzee's WBA title. Promoter Don King imagined the fight would be a blockbuster, with a black American fighter against a white fighter from South Africa. The two heavyweights were even photographed together with a smiling King standing between them. Holmes was undefeated in 45 fights, but he was 34 and some observers thought he was slipping; Coetzee was a slow-footed fighter, but he had crude strength and a good right hand. The bout might have been interesting, if only because it was a unification bout.

Kenny Bounds, a newcomer to promoting, "bought" Coetzee from King for a one-fight deal. Throwing money away by the bushel to promote the fight, Bounds quickly found himself $10-million in debt. Bounds had overestimated Holmes as an attraction and was surprised when he couldn't find backers. Larry had been part of some big fights, but he needed a co-star like Ali or Gerry Cooney to generate interest. Regardless of Coetzee's apartheid connection, the fight wasn't going to make money, unless Holmes took a major pay cut (Bounds had promised him $12-million). Five weeks before the fight, Bounds pulled the plug. King and Bob Arum spent a few months trying to revive Holmes-Coetzee, but a judge determined that Bounds had sold his rights to the fight to a fellow named Robert Hirschfield, who was under investigation for stock fraud.

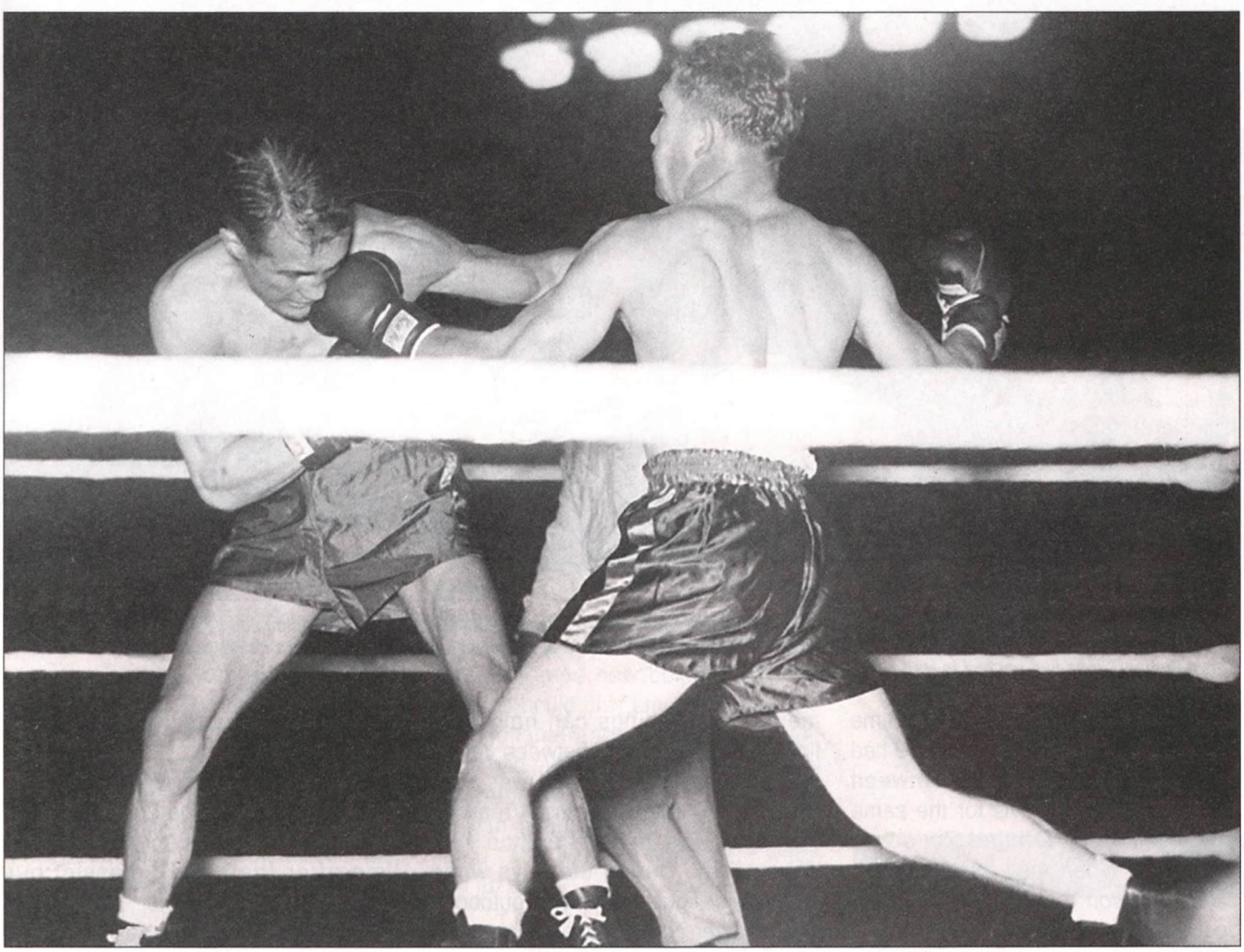
Holmes finally gave up on the fight, saying he'd never fight for Hirschfield.

The unfortunate side of postponing a bout is that the injured fighter is often accused of being scared. Vitali Klitschko has been called a coward numerous times (five of his fights have been postponed due to injuries). Oscar De La Hoya postponed his 2002 bout with Vargas because of a hand injury, and Vargas chided Oscar for being afraid of him. These comments, whether coming from a fighter or a promoter, always sound dumb.

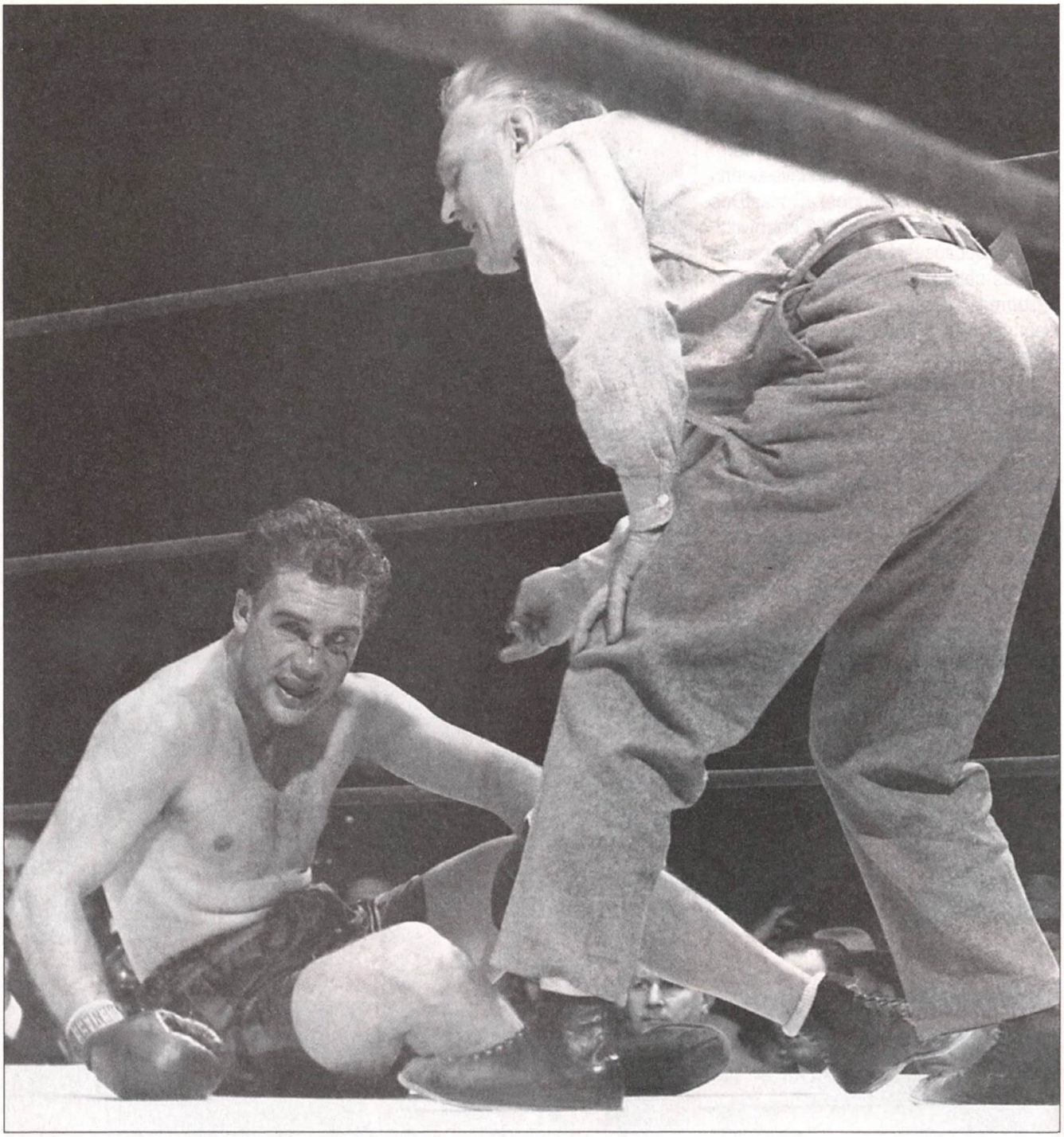
If you accused Fritzie Zivic of being scared of Freddie Cochrane, he'd probably thumb you in the eye. Yet, during the summer of 1941, welterweight champ Zivic postponed a bout with Cochrane three times. The first time was because Zivic had a painful carbuncle removed from his arm; the second time was because Zivic got



The proposed 1984 heavyweight unification match between WBA titleholder Gerrie Coetzee and WBC titlist Larry Holmes was announced, but the fight never happened because promoter Kenny Bounds couldn't come up with enough money.



Freddie "Red" Cochrane lands a left to Fritzie Zivic's face during their 1941 welterweight championship bout. Zivic had twice postponed the bout for medical reasons, but still lost the title via 15-round decision when they finally fought.



Referee Eddie Josephs counts out Billy Conn in the eighth round of Conn's 1946 rematch with heavyweight champion Joe Louis. There were several failed attempts to match the pair during World War II while both fighters were in the army, and Conn claimed that he would have beaten "The Brown Bomber" if he had not had to wait so long for a second shot.

sick. The bout fell through a third time because Zivic's promoter forgot he had already scheduled a bout between Zivic and Bummy Davis for the same week he'd rescheduled Zivic and Cochrane. When they finally fought, Cochrane won the title via 15-round decision.

While injuries have been the usual cause of cancellations and postponements, many things can hold up a fight. A 1920 title fight between Jimmy Wilde and Mickey Russell was canceled when religious Russell realized the fight was being held on Ash Wednesday. During the days when most major fights took place outdoors, bad weather could cause a postponement, such as when Miami rainstorms delayed the 1934 bout between Primo Carnera and Tommy Loughran for three days.

Sometimes historical events get in the way of a fight. Joe Louis and Billy Conn were eager to meet a second time after their 1941 classic, but World War II spoiled their plans. Both men enlisted shortly after their first bout, and there was talk that they would meet in October '42, while both

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

The Bernard Hopkins-Felix Trinidad middleweight championship bout at Madison Square Garden was postponed two weeks due to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The delay, however, didn't deter "The Executioner," who stopped Trinidad in the 12th round.

were in the service. That date was canceled when it was learned that most of the money wasn't going to Army relief, but rather to Louis' promoter and manager. A date in 1943 was scheduled, but the war department shot the idea down again, saying such an event would interfere with Conn and Louis' "duties." (Louis' duties were limited to sparring exhibitions for the entertainment of servicemen; Conn toured southern Army bases teaching recruits how to do pushups. A fight would've been an interesting morale booster, but military minds feared Adolph Hitler would invade America just as Conn and Louis were gloving up.)

"The Brown Bomber" and "The Pittsburgh Kid" wouldn't meet until June 1946, well after the war had ended. Louis won via kayo in eight rounds. For the rest of his life Conn blamed the loss on his Army hitch, and thought he might've beaten Louis had they fought in '43.

The September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001 caused a two-week postponement of the Bernard Hopkins-Felix Trinidad bout. In a way, the tragedy of the attacks created a unique atmosphere around the event. After two weeks of worrying about our country's scary situation, we craved something normal, like a championship fight. The delay seemed to work in Hopkins' favor, for he was a man known for waiting, whether it was in a prison cell or in a career limbo created by indifferent fans and promoters.

Underneath a JumboTron decorated in American flags with the words United We Stand in bright white lights, Hopkins stopped Trinidad in 11 rounds. Then he wrapped himself in patriotism and made a rousing speech about the firemen working at Ground Zero. For a while, at least, Hopkins was a strange new boxing icon, the sort that could only emerge in the face of a national tragedy. The postponement had everything to do with the way we embraced Hopkins that year, for only in the wake of September 11 could "The Executioner" seem warm and fuzzy. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to THE RING.

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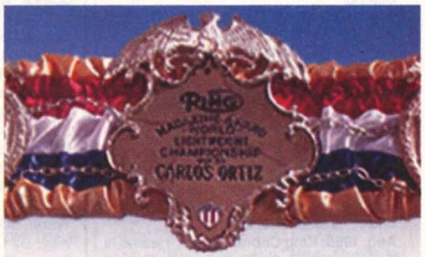

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Summary

Heavyweights

Samuel Peter W 12 Jameel McCline
Nikolay Valuev W 12 Jean-Francois Bergeron
Sultan Ibragimov W 12 Evander Holyfield
Tony Thompson KO 2 Cliff Couser
John Ruiz KO 2 Otis Tisdale
Joe Mesi KO 1 Shannon Miller
Jason Estrada KO 4 James Northey
Lisandro Diaz W 10 Sebastian Ceballos
Andrew Golota KO 6 Kevin McBride
Kali Meehan KO 6 DaVarryl Williamson
John McDermott W 10 Scott Gammer
Faruq Saleem W 6 Sedreck Fields
Chris Arreola KO 3 Thomas Hayes
B.J. Flores KO 2 Andy Sample
Mike Mollo KO 2 Art Binkowski
Raymond Olubowale KO 6 David Cadieux
Chazz Witherspoon KO 5 Ron Guerrero

Cruiserweights

Vadim Tokarev KO 3 Marlon Hayes
Krzysztof Wlodarczyk KO 1 Dominique Alexander
Mohamed Azzaoui KO 8 Henry Saenz
Frantisek Kasanic KO 7 Oliver Rubin
Rob Calloway KO 4 Galen Brown
Herbie Hide KO 1 Mircea Telecan
Ramiro Reducindo W 12 Felipe Romero
Neil Simpson W 10 Tony Booth
Pawel Kolodziej KO 4 Istvan Varga
Lawrence Tauasa KO 4 Jamie Wallace
Mark Hobson KO 4 John Keaton

Light Heavyweights

Chad Dawson KO 4 Epifanio Mendoza (*Retains WBC Title*)
Clinton Woods W 12 Julio Gonzalez (*Retains IBF Title*)
Omar Sheika KO 4 Tiwon Taylor
Tim Bell KO 8 Sean Connell
Heath Stenton KO 4 Yodchainoi Sor Samakkee

Super Middleweights

Lucian Bute KO 11 Alejandro Berrio (*Retains IBF Title*)
Allan Green KO 2 Sherwin Davis
Robert Stieglitz W 10 William Gare
Librado Andrade KO 7 Yusaf Mack
Jaidon Codrington KO 1 Wayne Johnsen
Jean Pascal KO 3 Esteban Camou
Sakio Bika W 5 Donny McCrary
Vitali Tsypko W 12 David Gogiya

Middleweights

Kelly Pavlik KO 7 Jermain Taylor (*Wins World Title; WBC Title*)
Felix Sturm D 12 Randy Griffin (*Retains WBA Title*)
Amin Asikainen W 4 Sylvain Touzet
Wayne Elcock W 12 Howard Eastman
Roman Aramian W 10 Alexander Sipos
Raymond Joval W 8 Alban Mothie
John Duddy KO 2 Prince Arron
Angel Hernandez W 8 Louis Turner
Ricardo Cortes W Disq. 3 Fernando Zuniga
Tetsuya Suzuki KO 2 Kazuyoshi Morihiro
Daniel Geale KO 2 Lee Oti
Joey Gilbert KO 1 Charles Howe
Andy Lee KO 1 James Morrow
Miguel Angel Espino KO 5 Arturo Ortega

Junior Middleweights

Marcus Portman W 12 Jozsef Matolcsi
Taisei Marumoto W 10 Sintung Kietbusaba
Harry Yorgey W 10 Martinus Clay
Daniel Santos KO 8 Jose Antonio Rivera
Nobuhiro Ishida W 10 Javier Mamani
Bradley Pryce KO 3 Martin Concepcion
Alex Bunema KO 3 Farid Shahid
Marcos Reyes KO 2 Nelson Estupinan
Frank LoPorto KO 1 Garry Comer
Rafael Pintos W 10 Claudio Abalos
Damian Jonak KO 9 Koba Karkashadze

Welterweights

Andre Berto KO 11 David Estrada
Isaac Hlatswayo W 12 Robert Medley
Hero Yauw Katili W 10 Doo-Suk Oh
Miguel Angel Rodriguez W 10 Jerome Ellis
Steve Forbes W 10 Francisco Bojado
Robert Frankel W 10 Michael Stewart
Favio Medina KO 8 Sergio Garcia
Mike Jones KO 1 Richard Hall
Welson Alves de Oliveira W Disq. 1 Oscar Samudio
Holly Holm W 10 Angelica Martinez
Yong-Sung Kim KO 6 Sapapetch Sor Sakaorat
Alex de Jesus KO 4 Bulmaro Solis
Karim Mayfield KO 2 Rahman Yasubov

Junior Welterweights

Somchai Nakbalee W 12 Fatai Onikeke
Cristian Bejarano W 12 Cesar Bazan
James Gorman W 10 Gary Hamilton
Mark Melligen W 10 Dondon Lapuz
Daniel Zell W 10 Tim Ruchholz
Rossemberth Gomez W 10 Moises Solis

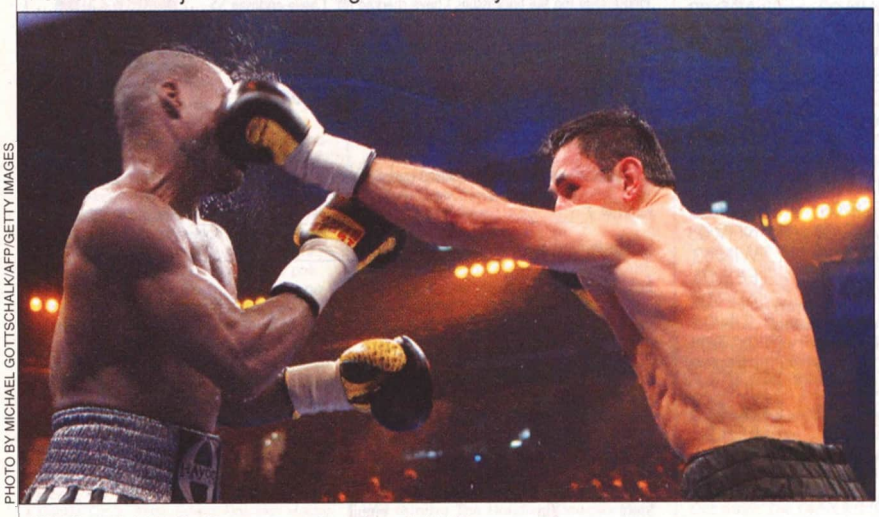

PHOTO BY MICHAEL GOTTSCHALK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Middleweight Felix Sturm connects on Randy Griffin

Ramon Montano W 10 Cristian Favela
Giuseppe Lauri KO 7 Michele Di Rocco
Ali Chebah KO 4
Payakchai Sithparadorn
Brunet Zamora KO 3
Emanuele De Prophetis
Raymundo Beltran KO 2
Baudel Cardenas
Martin Coggi KO 1 Fabian Martinez
Michel Rosales KO 1 Americo Santos
Devon Alexander KO 1 Cory Peterson

Lightweights

Juan Diaz KO 9 Julio Diaz
(*Retains WBA Title; Wins IBF Title*)
Amir Kahn KO 4 Scott Lawton
Irvin Buhlalu W 12 Benedict Dlamini
Julio Leon W 12 Cesar Soriano
Jonathan Thaxton KO 12 Dave Stewart
Efren Guerrero W 10
Victor Manuel Dominguez
Tsukasa Takase W 10
Tsuyoshi Takayama
Rolando Reyes KO 10 Stevie Johnston
Lee McAllister KO 9 Craig Docherty
Dodie Agrabio Tech. Win 9
Takashi Miura
Mlungisi Dlamini W 8 Robert Oyan
Vasyli Tarabarov W 8 Priest Smalls
Damian Fuller KO 2 Matt Zegan

Junior Lightweights

Manny Pacquiao W 12
Marco Antonio Barrera
Miguel Acosta W 12 Anges Adjaho
Yodsanan Nanthachai KO 1
Xu Zhong Yong
Humberto Toledo W 10 Luis Cardozo
Keisuke Akiba W 10 Koji Umetsu
Femi Fehintola W 10 Steven Bell

Featherweights

Steven Luevano W 12 Antonio Davis
Derry Matthews KO 11 Matthew Marsh
Masaki Sawanaga W 10
Daochai Sithsoei
Yodmongkol Singmanasak W 10
Kongdech Sithsaithong
Shoji Kimura D 10 Kazuma Miura
Miguel Roman W 10 Arturo Murillo
Irving Berry KO 9 Ramiro Lara
Frankie Archuleta KO 8
Armando Cordoba
Gilberto Leon KO 8 Jaime Maldonado
Eduardo Escobedo KO 6
Jose Mendoza
Jack Asis KO 6 Pedro Malco
Alejandro Perez KO 5 Jaime Villa
Michael Farenas KO 2
Arturo Valenzuela

Junior Featherweights

Daniel Ponce De Leon KO 5
Reynaldo Lopez
Satoshi Niwa W 10 Hiroki Sakamoto
Bernabe Concepcion KO 9
Salvador Garcia
Tshepo Mofokeng KO 9
Takalani Kwinda
Rachamongkol Sor Pleonchit KO 8
Narongnoi Or Muangklang
Rendall Munroe KO 6 Marc Callaghan
Mikihito Seto KO 5 Manabu Fukushima
Ricardo Cordoba KO 5 Danys Diaz
Anyetei Laryea KO 4 Isaac Ward
Ratanachai Sor Vorapin TKO 2
Rene Banares
Daisuke Yamanaka W 10
Sairung Suwanasil

Bantamweights

Joseph Agbeko KO 7 Luis Perez
(*Wins IBF Title*)
Tabtimdaeng Na Rachawat W 12
Eric Barcelona
Eugen Sorin W 12 Karim Quibir Lopez
Robert Allanic KO 11 In-Suk Song
Glenn Porras W 10 Rivo Rengkung
Kenichi Yamaguchi W 10
Atsushi Uchiyama
Tomoaki Hashizume W 10
Yuki Takemoto
Kohei Ohba W 10 Jonathan Ba
Michael Domingo KO 5 Roger Galicia
Richard Laano KO 3 Chris Dujali
Medgoen Singsurat KO 3
Noppachai Sithkosol
Victor Fonseca W 10 Dioberto Julio
Yonnhy Perez KO 4 Alexander Fedorov
Nehomar Cermeno KO 3
Abraham Irias
Ian Napa KO 7 Lee Haskins

Junior Bantamweights

Alexander Munoz W 12 Kuniyuki Aizawa
(*Retains WBA Title*)
Dimitri Kirilov W 12 Jose Navarro
(*Wins Vacant IBF Title*)
Cristian Mijares KO 1 Franck Gorjux
(*Retains WBC Title*)
Fernando Montiel KO 12 Luis Melendez
Juan Mercedes KO 12 Jose Bernal
Duangpetch Saengmorakot W 12
Celso Danggod
Kohei Kono W 12 Eden Sonsona
Santiago Acosta W 10 Sergio Santillan
Victor Zaleta KO 8 Eric Ortiz
Daigo Nakahiro KO 5
Samransak Singmanassak
Julio Miranda KO 4 Branni Sandoval
Oswaldo Rodriguez KO 2
Orlando Garcia
A.J. Banal KO 1 Esau Gaona

Flyweights

Daisuke Naito W 12 Daiki Kameda
(*Retains WBC Title*)
Vic Darchinyan KO 12
Federico Catubay
Rocky Fuentes W 12 Danilo Lerio
Luis Maldonado W 12 Sergio Espinoza
Giuseppe Lagana W 10
Darli Goncalves Pires
Noknoi Sitthiprasert W 10 Wang Jun Hui
Ryan Maliteg W 10 Sam Burdam
Cristian Cardenas D 10 Angel Rezago
Zolani Tete KO 3 Vicky Tahumil
Shingo Yamaguchi KO 2
Trong Twingym
Moruti Mthalane KO 1 Apol Suico

Junior Flyweights

Juan Carlos Reveco KO 5
Humberto Pool
(*Retains WBA Title*)
Nerys Espinoza W 10
Alfonso De La Hoz
Katsunari Takayama W 10 Fabio Marfa
Tommy Terado W 10 Steve Dimaisip
Nethra Sasiprapa W 8
Saensaknoi Or Muangklang
Wisanu Pornobnum KO 4
Little Roseman
Teruo Misawa KO 2
Petch Sakrungruang
Ronald Barrera KO 2
Jose Humberto Caraballo
Cesar Seda Jr. W Disq. 5
Felipe Almanza

Strawweights

Donnie Nietes W 12
Pornsawan Kratingdaenggym
Pigmy Muangchaiyaphum W 12
Saengpetch Sor Sakulphan
Dennis Juntillano W 10 Wendell Cajoles
Mating Kilakil D 10 Nelson Llanos
Zukisani Kwayiba KO 7 Alex Aroy
Milan Melindo KO 4 Nuapayak Sakkririn

Samuel Peter W 12 Jameel McCline

***New York, New York*:** In 2005, a still-raw Peter accomplished the rare feat of flooring his opponent, Wladimir Klitschko, three times and still losing via unanimous decision. Who would have thought that the same fighter could be involved in an identical scenario two years later, only in reverse?

Heavy underdog McCline leveled Peter three times in the first three rounds, then oddly decided to cruise through the final nine as THE RING's number-two heavyweight contender escaped Madison Square Garden with a unanimous decision. Peter, 250, Las Vegas, Nevada, via Akwaibom, Nigeria, claimed afterward that he'd suffered a broken hand in training camp, but there was no way to diminish what McCline, 266, West Palm Beach, Florida, almost accomplished.

The bout was dubbed a heavyweight title fight, based on the WBC handing Peter an interim belt. Peter was supposed to have challenged Oleg Maskaev for the WBC trinket, but Maskaev withdrew two weeks before the bout due to herniated disks in his back. Peter accepted the interim belt and the 6'6" McCline as a replacement opponent, only to have the show find itself in jeopardy again due to reports that McCline had allegedly been shipped more than $12,000 in steroids between March 2005 and December 2006.

But the show survived, and, early on, the Peter camp was regretting it. After dropping the first round on all three cards, the 37-year-old McCline, 38-8-3 (23), sent Peter down for the first time in his career with a short counter right uppercut to the jaw just before the close of the second round. Peter, 29-1 (22), got right back up, but he remained shaky at the start of the third.

McCline took advantage, landing another short right uppercut off the jab 15 seconds into the round. A badly staggered Peter tried to hold on, but McCline sent him down again with a vicious right hook to the face. Peter looked finished as he got up at six, but he managed to land several hard counters against an onrushing-but-tiring McCline. "Big Time" recovered enough to land three consecutive one-two combos to the head, the third of which put Peter on his seat with 61 seconds left in the round.

Peter again got up at six, and referee Mike Ortega (USA) looked as if he was ready to stop it. But despite Peter having no legs under him, McCline was too gassed to finish him off. He backed off the rest of the way, becoming increasingly reluctant to mix it up as the rounds wore on, while the 27-year-old Peter's steady pressure wore on McCline further.

"I am the champion and I needed to defend my belt," Peter said. "When I went down, I knew I had to stand up."

Judges Bill Costello (USA) and Steve Weisfeld (USA) had Peter winning comfortably at 115-110 and 115-111, respectively, while Julie Lederman (USA) scored it 113-112 for Peter. THE RING saw it 115-111 for Peter. All three judges scored the third round 10-7 for McCline, and all three had Peter winning the last four rounds.

"I wasn't happy with my performance," said McCline, who thought the scores were too lopsided. "I could've finished him. I should've finished him and I didn't. I thought I had him. He got away and that is why he is still champion. I will tell you this: Samuel Peter is a great champion."

Television: **Showtime**
Promoter: **Don King Productions**
(10-6-07)

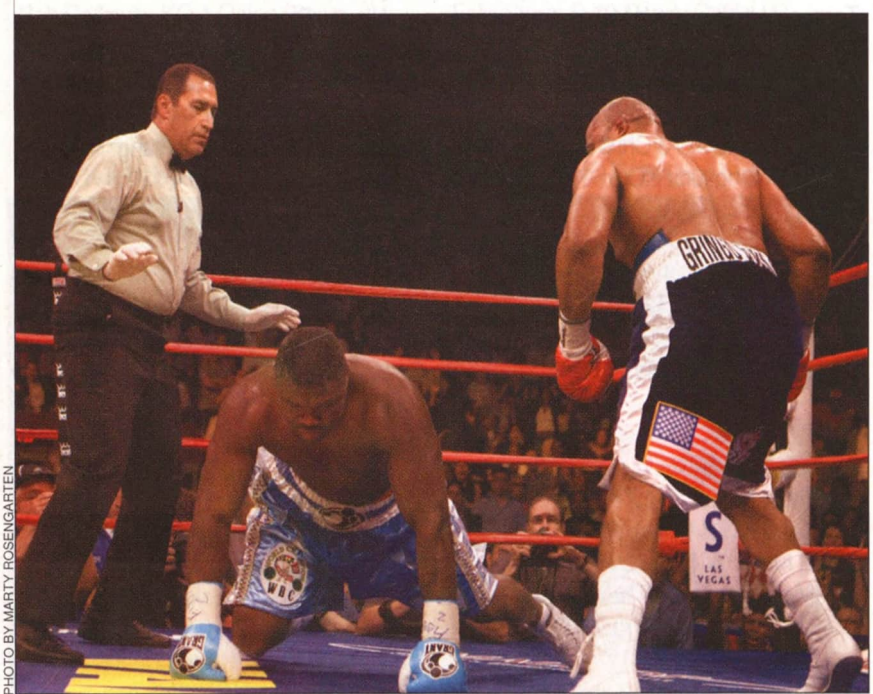

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Peter was down three times before rallying back to win

Daniel Santos KO 8 Jose Antonio Rivera

New York, New York: In a division in desperate need of an established top dog and some title clarity, Santos re-entered the title picture and effectively removed Rivera from it by winning a battle of veteran junior middleweights on the Peter-McCline undercard at Madison Square Garden. The bout was billed as an eliminator for the WBA title held by Joachim Alcine, but it more effectively served as a contender-status eliminator, and the bigger, stronger, more skillful Santos stepped up and won decisively.

Rivera, 154, Worcester, Massachusetts, took an aggressive approach from the outset, but Santos, 153, Bayamon,

Puerto Rico, easily avoided his rushes with slick footwork and counterpunched him silly. Rivera, 34, took a one-sided beating from Travis Simms in his previous fight and it almost seemed like a continuation of that fight here, especially starting in the fourth round when former WBO beltholder Santos, 32, began sitting down on his shots. The Puerto Rican southpaw's straight left couldn't miss, and in round five, he got Rivera in trouble in the corner and appeared to have referee Pete Santiago (USA) on the verge of stopping the fight.

But Rivera survived and avoided serious danger for the next two rounds, only to meet with his end in the eighth. A straight left from Santos hurt him and propelled him into the ropes, where the defenseless Rivera was bombarded with rights and lefts until a vicious left cross put him on the deck. Rivera, 38-6-1 (24), got up at the count of seven and raised his hands to indicate he was okay to continue, but Santiago did the right thing and stopped the fight at the 2:50 mark.

"Our game plan was to take him into deep water in the later rounds and that's what I did," said Santos, 31-3-1 (22).

"He had a field day with me," Rivera humbly admitted afterward. Retirement talk swirled around "El Gallo" afterward, and considering the punishment he's absorbed in consecutive stoppage losses in his last two fights, it may be a logical next step.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Santos knocks Rivera partway out of the ring

Promoter: **Don King Productions**
(10-6-07)

THE RING Fighter of the Month

Kelly Pavlik

There was something familiar about the sight of Kelly Pavlik on the canvas in the second round of his middleweight championship bout against Jermain Taylor. He'd been knocked down once before, early in a tough fight against Fulgencio Zuniga. But that's not why it seemed so familiar. It was because the same situation had played out so many times in the past: Undefeated fighter arrives at his first bid for a title, gets hit like he's never been hit before, and promptly falls apart. Michael Grant against Lennox Lewis, Kermit Cintron against Antonio Margarito, Marvis Frazier against Larry Holmes, Joe Lipsey against Bernard Hopkins, and on and on. Boxing history is dotted with fighters whose moments arrived and, thanks in part to the dangerous men they shared the ring with, those moments overwhelmed them.

For a couple of minutes there, that looked to be the way things were headed for Pavlik. Taylor drilled him with a right hand in the second round, and then followed up with a barrage that reduced the 6'2" challenger to about two feet tall on his hands and knees. It didn't look like he was going to survive the round. His moment had arrived, and it was more than he could handle.

Until Pavlik got up, gutted out the round, handled the moment—and gradually started handling Taylor. In the seventh round, Pavlik did what both Bernard Hopkins and Winky Wright couldn't do, flattening Taylor and taking the 160-pound world title. He showed power, he showed skill, but most of all, he showed resolve between the punches that threatened to cave his world in and the ones that *did* cave Taylor's world in. That's the stuff world champions are made of, and that's the stuff Fighters of the Month are made of.

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Chad Dawson KO 4 Epifanio Mendoza

Sacramento, California: In the headline bout of a twin-title card at Arco Arena, Dawson was originally scheduled to face Adrian Diaconu of Canada. When Diaconu dropped out of the bout due to a hand injury, Mendoza came in on 12 days' notice. Dawson wasn't looking past his replacement challenger, however. In his second defense of the WBC light heavyweight title, Dawson dominated throughout in front of a paid crowd of 3,876 before stopping Mendoza at 2:30 of the fourth round.

Dawson, 172¾, New Haven, Connecticut, came out at the opening bell working behind his long right jab. By the middle of the round, Dawson began connecting with his left cross to Mendoza's chin. Mendoza, 175, Barranquilla, Colombia, fired back with some left hooks, but most of them missed or were blocked by Dawson.

Dawson increased his pressure in the second, frequently backing Mendoza against the ropes. Mendoza, though game, could do little as Dawson caught him with a left-right-left to the face, and then staggered him near the end of the round with a right-left to the jaw. The third round saw even more of the same. Dawson, while not a devastating puncher, has the frame of a cruiserweight and was just too big and strong for Mendoza, who has been a middleweight for most of his career. Dawson spent the round bulling Mendoza around the ring and unloading virtually at will. The round ended with Mendoza badly hurt in a neutral corner.

Dawson, 25, switched to a body attack in the fourth, nearly flooring the 31-year-old Mendoza at one point before backing him against the ropes and unleashing a barrage. With Mendoza unable to fight back, referee Jon Schorle (USA) wisely called a halt at 2:30 of the round. At the time of the stoppage, judges Duane Ford (USA) and John Keane (England) had Dawson ahead, 30-27, while Dr. James Jen Kin (USA) also favored Dawson, 29-28.

Dawson, 25-0 (17), told reporters afterward, "I did what I was supposed to do. I got him out of there. I executed."

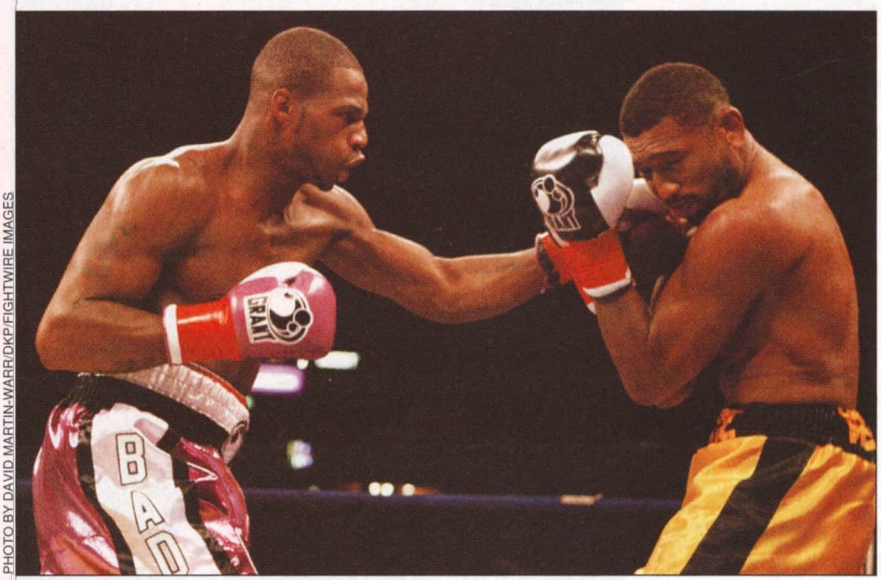

PHOTO BY DAVID MARTIN-WARR/DKP/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Dawson made quick work of late-sub Mendoza

When asked if the change in opponents had affected his strategy, he replied, "It didn't bother me at all. It would have been the same with Diaconu." He repeatedly challenged Antonio Tarver, adding, "I will do this to anyone. I am the best in the world." Mendoza, 28-5-1 (24), called Dawson "a great fighter. It just wasn't my day today. I was overwhelmed with how fast he was."

Television: **Showtime**
Promoters: **Don King Productions in association with Maloof Sports & Entertainment**
(9-29-07)
Steve Nicolaisen

Joseph Agbeko KO 7 Luis Perez

Sacramento, California: In the supporting bout under Dawson-Mendoza, virtual unknown Agbeko, in only his second appearance in the United States and just his third bout since 2004, thoroughly dominated Perez before stopping him after seven rounds to win the IBF bantamweight title.

Agbeko, 116¾, Bronx, New York, by way of Accra, Ghana, and Perez, 118, Managua, Nicaragua, went right at one another from the opening bell. The first two rounds were close, with Agbeko's combinations giving him the edge over the southpaw titleholder's wider and less frequent punches. Agbeko picked up the pace in the third, easily outboxing Perez, the latter obviously affected by his struggles to make the 118-pound limit (when Perez hit the scales at 118½ the day of the bout, he was compelled to sweat off a half pound per IBF edict).

In a slower fourth, Perez managed to score with his left hook to both head and body, but he still missed far more than he landed as Agbeko slipped and ducked many of his punches, and then countered with left-right combinations. Agbeko increased his mastery of Perez in the fifth, avoiding "El Demoledor's" right jab while catching Perez frequently with his own rights to the head.

Perez attempted to rally in the sixth, but was soon backing off from Agbeko's pressure and frequent combinations to the face. At one point Agbeko slipped a Perez right, then fired back with two rights, a left, then another right to the head without a return. Agbeko pushed a weakened Perez to the canvas late in the round and was warned by referee Dan Stell (USA). Perez returned the favor by pushing Agbeko down in the seventh, but spent most of the round absorbing hurtful rights to the head. After the round ended, ringside physician Dr. Smith Ketchum examined Perez in his corner and recommended that the bout be halted because of the punishment Perez had absorbed. Referee Stell promptly called the bout at that point.

"I dominated him," said Agbeko, 25-1 (22). "If the referee didn't stop it, I would

have stopped him." He expressed a desire for a rematch with Wladimir Sidorenko of Ukraine, now the WBA bantamweight titlist, who handed Agbeko his only loss, by a majority decision back in 2004. Perez, 25-2 (16), was taken afterward to the University of California Medical Center for observation. This was the two-division former beltholder's first loss in seven years.

All three judges—Richard Green (USA), Fritz Werner (USA), and Patricia Jarman (USA)—had Agbeko ahead 70-63, awarding him every round.

Television: **Showtime**
Promoters: **Don King Productions in association with Maloof Sports & Entertainment**
(9-29-07)
Steve Nicolaisen

PHOTO BY DAVID MARTIN-WARR/DKP/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Agbeko spears Perez with a right en route to upset victory

Steve Forbes W 10 Francisco Bojado

Las Vegas, Nevada: Both Forbes and Bojado are counterpunchers who usually like to wait for their opponents to make mistakes and then make them pay. Sometimes, battles of counterpunchers can be boring; that wasn't the case here. However, battles of counterpunchers do often turn out to be difficult to score, and that did end up being the case in this fight. In this technical yet fast-paced boxing match on the Pacquiao-Barrera II undercard, which had originally been scheduled for three weeks earlier but got pushed back when the September 15 pay-per-view card fell apart, veteran Forbes came away with a 10-round split decision. Many viewed it as a step toward justice in light of Forbes' controversial decision loss to Demetrius Hopkins in his previous fight.

Both Bojado, Los Angeles, California, via Guadalajara, Mexico, and Forbes, Las Vegas, Nevada, carry their left hands low but throw accurate left jabs. During the first half of the fight, the action went back and forth and a case could be made for either man at the ends of the rounds.

One-time mega-prospect Bojado, who had trouble making the agreed-upon 142-pound weight limit (he ultimately came in at 144 and paid Forbes $5,000 out of his purse), was jumping in at the start of the fight with a left hook, seemingly trying to take Forbes, 142, by surprise. It worked a few times, but Forbes, a former junior lightweight titlist and runner-up on the second season of the reality show *The Contender*, did some fine work of his own with right uppercuts that rocked the 24-year-old Bojado's head back. Although they were both using their jabs, Forbes, 30, had more success with his. He was able to get off first with it and then counter Bojado's jabs with uppercuts.

The last two rounds of the bout were close. Bojado, 18-3 (12), was still trying to land the left hook, and Forbes, 33-5 (9), was putting together three- and four-punch combinations, trying to catch the judges' eye. The last round may have pulled it out for Forbes, but no matter who you thought won, it was a fine matchup of world-class fighters that the fans enjoyed.

Judge Duane Ford (USA) scored the fight 96-94 for Forbes, Chuck Giampa (USA) saw it 96-94 for Bojado, and Herb Santos (USA) had it 97-94 for Forbes. THE RING scored it 96-94 for Forbes. Referee Joe Cortez (USA) was barely seen in this fight, as it was clean throughout.

"I definitely think I won the fight," Forbes declared. "The cancellation of September 15 upset me a little bit, but I was back in the gym right away to get ready for whatever fight came my way. His speed surprised me and he was able to evade some of my shots even when he got tired. I was landing the uppercut all night long and it felt great to land that shot. I was landing it at will."

Bojado said, "I hurt my right hand during the fight. I can't remember which round, but I know I hurt it. I disagree with the judges' decision. I think I did enough to win the fight."

Television: **HBO Pay-Per-View**
Promoter: **Golden Boy Promotions, Top Rank**
(10-6-07)
Wayne McCullough

Steven Luevano W 12 Antonio Davis

Las Vegas, Nevada: In the main supporting bout on the Manny Pacquiao vs. Marco Antonio Barrera II card at the Mandalay Bay Events Center, Luevano made his first defense of the WBO featherweight title he'd won by knocking out Nicky Cook in July, and the Californian's skill level proved too high for handpicked challenger Davis. Luevano, 126, Las Puente, California, boxed beautifully for 12 rounds against Davis, 126, Atlanta, Georgia, punctuating the performance with a late-rounds knockdown to secure the wide points win.

"I controlled the fight with my jab," Luevano said afterward. "I had a very hard time with him in the first four rounds. He was very awkward, but once I started hitting him on the body,

I knew I was on my way."

From the outset, Luevano moved around the ring using his southpaw jab to keep the stalking Davis at a distance. Davis had some success in moving forward very awkwardly to avoid some of those jabs, though he didn't land noteworthy punches of his own. It seemed as though Davis had a plan to get close and work his opponent's body with short hooks in the early stages of the fight. But in the third round, as Davis threw a shot to the body, Luevano, 26, landed a solid right and left to Davis' head that shook him up a little. Often, Davis would try to make his opponent stand and trade, but that didn't work as Luevano punched his way inside and then got out of the way.

Luevano was in complete command during the second half of the fight. He jabbed and moved, scoring hard with one-two combinations to the 35-year-old Davis' head. Luevano was now using a hard right uppercut that hurt Davis to the body, and by the 10th round, the challenger's eye was swollen. Luevano continued to prod at the swelling with right jabs, attempting to make the damage worse.

In the 11th round, Luevano, 34-1 (15), was landing right jabs and straight lefts at will while the gutsy Davis, 24-4 (12), continued to push forward, showing a big heart. Just before the end of the round, a left hand to the head put Davis down, but he was able to get up and was saved by the bell. In the last round, Luevano moved and boxed smartly and landed a hard bodyshot that almost bent Davis over.

Judges Burt Clements (USA) and Levi Martinez (USA) both scored the fight 119-108 for Luevano, and C.J. Ross (USA) had it 118-109. The referee was Toby Gibson (USA).

"I was very happy that I made my first defense of the title here in Las Vegas," Luevano said. "I hope to come back again and show what I can do."

Davis said, "I had problems picking up his right jab because of my eye. I thought I gave a great effort. I just had too many problems with my eye, which was nearly shut."

Television: **HBO Pay-Per-View**
Promoter: **Golden Boy Promotions, Top Rank**
(10-6-07)
Wayne McCullough

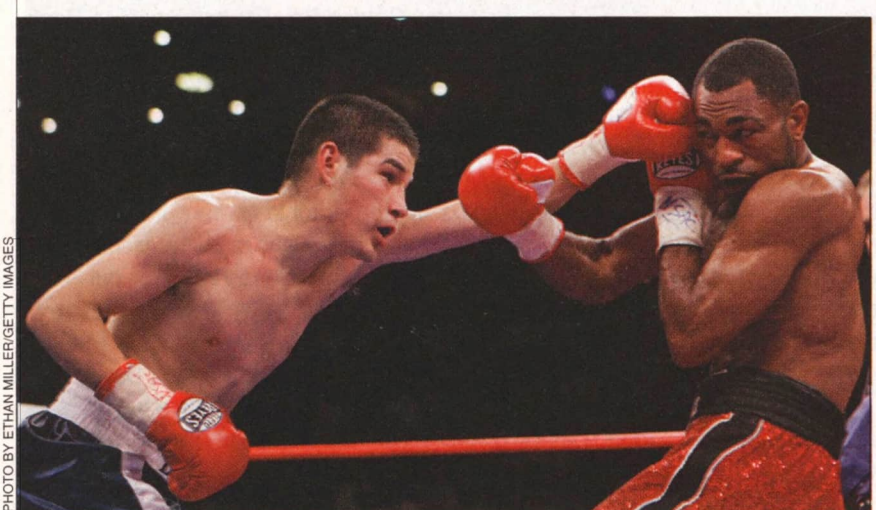

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Luevano penetrates Davis' guard with a left

Jorge Arce KO 6 Tomas Rojas

Las Vegas, Nevada: Coming off an upset loss to Cristian Mijares in which he found himself outmaneuvered at every turn, Arce was experiencing some serious déjà vu in what was thought to be a get-well fight, a bout against journeyman Rojas on a small Sunday evening card on Mexican Independence Day weekend at The Joint at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. Through five rounds, two-division former titlist Arce was on the wrong end of a shutout. But Arce's reputation for heavy hands and pugilistic drama exists for a reason, and a single bodyshot turned the rout around and propelled him to a sensational TKO victory.

Arce, 118, Los Mochis, Mexico, went to the body early and often, but the effect on Rojas, 117½, Veracruz, Mexico, was minimal at first. Southpaw Rojas was in the zone, landing an assortment of uppercuts and right hooks, standing and trading with Arce and generally having the speed and the moves to get the better of the exchanges. Rojas stepped up the attack in the third and fourth rounds, snapping the 28-year-old Arce's head back on a few occasions, but "El Travieso" was tough to discourage and kept punching back. Rojas came in with 10 losses, but he'd never been knocked out and usually lost competitive, sometimes controversial, decisions, so he did his best to keep pounding on Arce and take it out of the judges' hands.

That approach backfired in the sixth round. A sudden left hand to the slim body of the 27-year-old Rojas sent the prefight underdog to the canvas. He beat the count of referee Joe Cortez (USA), but was in too much pain to protect himself, and Arce pounced and forced the stoppage exactly one minute into the round with Rojas, 26-11 (18), trapped along the ropes.

"I landed a bodypunch in the previous round and noticed Rojas didn't take it that well," said Arce, 47-4-1 (36). "I thought I lost every round of the fight and [bodypunching] was my only chance to win." With a loss to lefty Mijares followed by this scare against Rojas, Arce gave clear instructions to his manager, Fernando Beltran, after the fight: "No more southpaws."

Promoter: **Top Rank**
(9-16-07)

Librado Andrade KO 7 Yusaf Mack

Las Vegas, Nevada: In a surprising super middleweight thriller that stole the show on the Pacquiao-Barrera II card at the Mandalay Bay Events Center, Andrade hit the deck early but turned it around to put Mack down three times and pull out the win.

With only one fight under his belt since he got badly beaten at the hands of Mikkel Kessler in March, Andrade, 168, Guanajuato, Mexico, plodded forward sluggishly at the start of the fight against Mack, 168, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. But as Andrade pushed Mack back with short punches in the opening round, Mack

stepped to his left and unloaded a hook to the top of Andrade's head that sent him down, much to the surprise of the fans in the arena—not to mention Andrade himself.

"I thought the world came on top of me when he hit me with that shot in the first round," the Mexican said afterward. "I looked up at the screen and said, 'Man what a beautiful shot.'"

Andrade got up on wobbly legs, but Mack, 27, didn't jump on him. He just moved around the ring instead of trying to finish the fight. Andrade, 29, had taken numerous blows from Kessler over 12 rounds and didn't go down. But this time, against a lesser puncher, he had tasted the canvas.

After the knockdown, Andrade came back to win the next two rounds as Mack, who also had only one loss going into this fight (he was stopped in May 2006 by Alejandro Berrio), did more defensive work than punching. Over the next couple of rounds, Mack got back into his groove by moving, using his left jab, and making Andrade miss. Andrade was still slow and wide open for any and every punch that was thrown his way, and Mack constantly threw overhand rights that knocked his opponent's head back and forth. Andrade took the punches and continued to plow forward, chipping away slowly at Mack's head and body. Referee Jay Nady (USA) continually warned Andrade for the use of his head and Mack for low blows.

In the sixth, Mack worked the body and then waited for Andrade's right hand, which he countered over the top with left hooks. But he was tired by this point and had a hard time keeping Andrade from getting inside.

Through six rounds, Andrade was behind 58-55 on all three judges' scorecards.

The fight took a dramatic change in the seventh round, as Andrade's pressure caught up with Mack. Mack, 23-2-2 (14), took a knee when he got hit by an uppercut and looked exhausted as he got to his feet. Andrade moved in, and Mack went down again, seemingly without a punch landing. By this point it was clear to see that the Philadelphian was finished. He got back up, but a flurry by Andrade, 26-1 (20), topped off by a bodyshot, had Mack on the canvas for a third time. The fight was called off at 2:34 of round number seven, giving Andrade a TKO win.

"I had the flu when I came into the fight," Andrade said afterward, "but the champion came out of me. It's such a beautiful, sweet feeling."

"I'm okay," Mack told the press. "I hit him with everything I had. I got a little discouraged because I couldn't figure out what it would take to knock him out. I was hitting him with everything. He used his head a lot, but he was a good fighter."

Television: **HBO Pay-Per-View**
Promoter: **Golden Boy Promotions, Top Rank**
(10-6-07)
Wayne McCullough

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Andrade outlasts Mack in slugfest

Fernando Montiel KO 12 Luis Melendez

Las Vegas, Nevada: Junior bantamweight speedster Montiel has always been so graceful in the way he moves and throws his punches that even on nights when he executes a primarily negative, defensive fight plan, he can still be entertaining. And when he executes an offense-minded, high-risk, high-drama fight plan, he can be absolutely scintillating, and that was the case in this unexpected Fight of the Year contender against relatively anonymous Colombian Melendez at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. Montiel scored a knockdown and seemed on the verge of a kayo win, then suffered a knockdown and seemed on the verge of a kayo loss, and ultimately battled back to score a knockdown and a knockout with about a minute to go in the fight to retain the WBO 115-pound title.

Making the fifth defense of his second alphabet reign at this weight, Montiel, 115, Los Mochis, Mexico, got his offense in gear in the second round, attacking the challenger with bodyshots. But southpaw Melendez, 114½, was clever and dangerous, and he rocked Montiel twice in the round with counter right hooks. In the third, Melendez, 27, buckled Montiel's knees with a straight left, and it became clear that the titleholder was in for a tough night.

A clash of heads in the fourth seemed to affect both men, but Montiel, 25, didn't take long to get back on track and zone in again on the Colombian's body. With just about 15 seconds to go in round six, Montiel broke through with a three-punch combination that snapped his opponent's head back, then jumped on Melendez with an attack including a right to the jaw and two hard left hooks that dropped him on his rear just as the bell was ringing. Referee Kenny Bayless (USA) recited the eight-count before sending Melendez to his stool.

But just when it seemed Melendez was ready to go, he came out winging wild shots and found a home for a searing left cross, landing it square on Montiel's jaw, causing him to bounce off the ropes, pitch forward, and roll on the canvas before righting himself and getting to his feet at the count of nine. With more than two minutes left in the round, it seemed likely that the upset would be completed, but Montiel was just elusive and gutsy enough to make it back to his corner with a buzzing brain and a cut under his right eye.

The Mexican bounced right back in the eighth, hammering home right hands as though the seventh round had never happened. A left-right made the Colombian sway late in the round, and it was all Montiel from there, as he gradually sapped Melendez' strength and pulled away to a big lead. Midway through round 12, Montiel scored with a picturesque left uppercut and then harpooned the challenger with a heavy left to the gut. Melendez, 25-3-1 (20), collapsed to his knees, unable to disguise his pain. He got up at the count of seven, but Montiel, 35-2-1 (26), pounced with a few quick, hard shots, and Bayless signaled the end at 1:58 of the round. Montiel led on all three cards, by seven, seven, and six points, through 11 rounds.

Television: **Vs.**
Promoter: **Top Rank**
(10-4-07)

Edgar Sosa KO 9 Lorenzo Trejo

Las Vegas, Nevada: Some fighters like to dive right in at the deep end with tough defenses immediately after winning titles, and others like to spend as much time as possible dipping their toes in. The latter is the route being taken by Sosa and his handlers since his upset win in April over Brian Viloria for the vacant WBC light flyweight title, as he followed up an easy first defense against Luis Lazarte with a similarly non-threatening bout against 15-loss challenger Trejo in the co-feature to Arce-Rojas at The Joint. Like the main event, this was a battle of Mexicans, appropriate for the holiday weekend, but these were two Mexicans on different levels as fighters.

Trejo, 108, Ciudad Obregon, Mexico, was gutsy and game, but he was also outsized (a career strawweight who'd lost a close title challenge to Eagle Kyowa 10 months earlier) and didn't have the skills to cope with Sosa's jab. That left stick set the tone for the fight, giving the titleholder total control for eight rounds before he opened up and forced the stoppage in the ninth.

Sosa, 107, Mexico City, gave ground as he jabbed and moved early, but in the third round, he turned up the aggression and gained Trejo's respect with powerpunches in combination. At the end of the third, Trejo scored with his best punch, a flush right hand, but it wasn't quite enough to win the round.

The fighters traded in the fourth, but Sosa intelligently capped the flurries with some stiff jabs. And thanks to the much wider punches of the challenger, those jabs almost always found a home. At the end of the fourth, an assault by Sosa, 28, sent the 30-year-old Trejo wobbling back to his corner. Trejo came out charging angrily in the fifth, looking for one big shot to turn the fight around, but Sosa's jab and movement prevented a reversal of fortune. The next two rounds featured more of the same, until Sosa obliged and traded with Trejo in the eighth—getting the better of the action. By round nine, Trejo, 30-16 (17), was tired and Sosa, 29-5 (15), sensed it, so he opened up with both hands, drove the challenger into the ropes, and blitzed him until ref Tony Weeks (USA) called a well-received halt at the 2:02 mark.

Promoter: **Top Rank**
(9-16-07)

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Melendez and Montiel engage in thriller

Clinton Woods W 12 Julio Gonzalez

Sheffield, England: If THE RING light heavyweight champion, Bernard Hopkins, is indeed serious about looking to Europe for his next challenge—Joe Calzaghe, THE RING's super middleweight champion from Wales, and Russia's WBO heavyweight titleholder, Sultan Ibragimov, have both been identified by Hopkins as potential foes, while Hungary's Zsolt Erdei is his top contender at 175 pounds—he could do worse than to pick a fight with Woods, 173½, Sheffield, England. Unlike Winky Wright, whom Hopkins defeated on points in July, Woods is a genuine light heavyweight, and a hard-fought and entertaining three-fight series with Glen Johnson—one draw, one defeat, and, finally, a victory—underlined his credentials, as did this second victory over the tough and durable Gonzalez, 174½, Huntington Beach, California, via Guerrero

Negro, Mexico, at the Hallam FM Arena. It was Woods' fourth defense of the IBF light heavyweight title, which he won against American Rico Hoye in March 2005.

Gonzalez, who became the first fighter to defeat Dariusz Michalczewski (having previously beaten Johnson and gone the distance with a peak Roy Jones), went 12 rounds with Woods in September 2005, dropping a decision in the same venue that staged their exciting rematch. Woods, who was outclassed and stopped in six rounds by Jones in 2002, but has since improved his technique and self-belief, was made to dig deep into his reserves of resilience. The exchanges were fierce and compelling, and it was the 35-year-old Woods' greater desire that was the key.

From the outset, both men made their intentions clear. Gonzalez, 31 years old and as tall as his 6'2" opponent, took the fight to Woods, using his jab to find the range for his hooks and solid right crosses. He was accurate too, and Woods was forced to give ground before retaliating with hard shots to the head and body. Gonzalez asserted himself in the fifth round with a vicious assault to the body, digging in his left hook and driving Woods to the ropes. They swapped right hands to the jaw before the bell, and it appeared as if the challenger had seized the initiative.

PHOTO BY CHRIS ROYLE/ FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Gonzalez has Woods on the ropes

Woods rallied hard in the sixth, however, shaking Gonzalez with a right hand and left hook to the chin, and in the seventh he used his jab and boxing skills to frustrate Gonzalez, who betrayed signs of wilting as he returned to his corner, shaking his head and looking fatigued. But Gonzalez, 41-4 (25), came through this mini-crisis and forced Woods, 41-3-1 (24), to the ropes again in round nine. As the two stood toe-to-toe, it looked as if the outcome of the fight was in the balance.

Then Woods launched a decisive effort in the 10th round, staggering Gonzalez with a right hand. In the 11th, a solid left to the jaw spearheaded a sustained onslaught by Woods that left Gonzalez reeling around the ring. A cut near the challenger's right eye prompted British referee Dave Parris to take a close look at the wound and at Gonzalez' overall condition. Somehow the challenger survived and he even managed to force the action in the final round. Woods sustained a cut by the side of his right eye and he was shaken by a series of heavy blows, but he was too close to victory to let it slip. The final bell was greeted by a crescendo of cheers in appreciation of the terrific action, particularly over the final three rounds, as much as it was to signify the hometown favorite's victory.

Valerie Dorsett (USA) scored 117-111 for Woods, as did Phil Edwards (England) by a closer margin, 115-113. Mike Fitzgerald's (USA) card of 116-112 mirrored THE RING's.

"Gonzalez matched me all the way and it was a hard fight, but that's what you expect against a tough guy like him," said Woods, a tough guy too.

Promoter: **Dennis Hobson**
(9-29-07)
Brian Doogan

Alexander Munoz W 12 Kuniyuki Aizawa

Tokyo, Japan: Venezuelan puncher "El Explosivo" Munoz, 115, retained the WBA super flyweight belt as he kept stalking Japanese footworker Aizawa, 114¾, decked him with a long left hook in the closing seconds of the ninth, and gained a lopsided decision over 12 rounds at Korakuen Hall. Judge Cesar Ramos (Puerto Rico) scored it 118-109, Mikael Hook (Sweden) had it 120-107, and Glenn Feldman (USA) saw it 120-106, all in favor of the aggressive titlist. The referee was Luis Pabon (Puerto Rico), who had to urge Aizawa twice to exchange more punches rather than keep circling.

If the goal of Aizawa, a former OPBF beltholder and national amateur champ, was to last the distance, then he succeeded in making good use of his feet. But what he displayed was only his fast footwork and good defense, not his heart.

Munoz, making his first defense of his second title reign, started the fight throwing punches intended to score an early stoppage, and he kept attacking the negative and circling challenger (though with limited precision) to win the first four rounds with ease. Munoz seldom caught the elusive target with his vaunted powerpunches, but clearly piled up points every round.

It was in the fourth that Aizawa, 28, began to throw a few

jabs and right crosses, but Munoz, also 28, maintained the pressure and deserved the round. In the sixth, Aizawa threw a single solid shot, a well-timed straight right, that effectively caught Munoz' chin and got the crowd roaring. Aizawa, however, didn't follow up, and returned to his original game plan of utilizing his footwork, while Munoz attempted to retaliate with busy and strong punches. All three judges gave all six rounds in the first half of the fight to Munoz.

People expected to see Aizawa turn loose in the second half and to see Munoz, often a fast starter, slow down. But it didn't happen, as Munoz kept taking the initiative (even though he repeatedly had trouble landing against the Japanese dancer).

Munoz finally caught Aizawa in the closing seconds of the ninth when he connected with a long left hook following a left-right combination, dropping him on the deck near the corner. It was more a case of Aizawa losing his balance than actually being hurt, and he had no trouble making it to the end of the round.

In the 11th, Aizawa finally began to turn loose against the fading Venezuelan, who had sapped his own stamina through his aggression. But Munoz still retaliated with enough powerful punches to perhaps win the round.

The 12th and final session was probably Aizawa's best, as he decided to fight with a sense of desperation. But one round wasn't enough to change the crowd's feeling of great disappointment in Aizawa's negative performance. Aizawa, 13-2-1 (10), simply did not fight to win. Munoz, 31-2 (27), had a longer reach and kept throwing long and strong punches. If Aizawa intended to score, he should have moved in closer to El Explosivo rather than staying at such a distance and moving away from him throughout the fight.

Promoter: **Misako Promotions**

(9-24-07)

Joe Koizumi

PHOTO BY KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Munoz rives a right into Aizawa's face

Nicolay Valuev W 12
Jean-Francois Bergeron

Oldenburg, Germany: Five months after being cut down to size by Ruslan Chagaev, "The Russian Giant" began to rebuild his career with an uninspiring but clear-cut points win over Bergeron, 229½, St. Jerome, Quebec. A firefighter by trade, the previously unbeaten Bergeron looked like he should have brought along his ladder. Despite some success, most notably in the second round when a left cross caused Valuev's legs to buckle, the 34-year-old southpaw could not get to grips with his 7'2" opponent for any sustained period, and the former WBA heavyweight titleholder, the tallest and heaviest man ever to lay claim to a major heavyweight belt, was able to box his way methodically to success at the EWE Arena.

Bergeron's claims of robbery lacked merit, for he was simply too passive for much of the contest, preferring to circle the ring and present an elusive target rather than initiating the kind of exchanges at close quarters that might have proved fruitful. How was he to outbox Valuev, 47-1 (34), from long range? Chagaev's method was to make Valuev commit to the punch, then slip inside and counter, but Bergeron, 27-1 (19), offered only lateral movement and punches at infrequent intervals, which made largely for a lifeless spectacle.

There were 30 seconds remaining in the second round when the only real drama of the fight occurred. Valuev had landed a glancing right to the side of Bergeron's head as the Canadian lay against the ropes, but he bounced off them and landed a solid left on Valuev's exposed jaw. Momentarily, Valuev was stunned. His knees dipped and the crowd gasped, but Bergeron was too slow and too cautious to take advantage. Instead of following up with the kind of furious assault that may have resulted in a shock, he gave Valuev time to recover his equilibrium. The danger quickly passed and a tedious encounter ensued with conflict confined to a minimum.

What action there was Valuev, 320¾, St. Petersburg, Russia, controlled with his long left jab and overhand right. Bergeron, simply did not do enough to disrupt the giant's rhythm or persuade the judges that his tactics warranted either attention or approval. There was so much fencing and feinting that they sometimes resembled two mime artists, but Valuev was just scoring enough to take the rounds, The punch stats in the third and fourth rounds could have been tabulated on one hand. Valuev got through twice with his right hand in the fifth before he took another left, and Bergeron made him miss with two wild swings before the bell.

A couple of one-two combinations were virtually enough for Valuev to

claim the sixth, and his jab extended his command in the seventh, but Bergeron found the mark again with his left cross in the eighth, as he scored with it twice and won his first round since the second. But there was to be no permanent shift in momentum, as Valuev's right penetrated Bergeron's guard again in the ninth, despite the Canadian staying nimble on his feet. Valuev attacked the body in the 10th and landed two solid lefts to the midsection of Bergeron. Belatedly, there was more cut and thrust in the final round as Valuev charged forward and landed a right hand in a neutral corner and a jab that snapped back Bergeron's head. But the combatants' newfound passion was no compensation for all the carefulness that had gone before.

Still, there was only one winner. Henk Meijers (Holland) scored 118-111, Philippe Verbeke (Belgium) 117-111, and John Coyle (England) 118-111, all for Valuev. THE RING also had it 118-111.

"That's always the problem when you don't have a knockout and have a decision," Valuev said of the fans voicing their displeasure at the final bell. "Maybe some of it had to do with him being the smaller guy."

PHOTO BY THOMAS STARKE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Valuev launches comeback with decision over Bergeron

Promoter: **Wilfried Sauerland**
(9-29-07)
Brian Doogan

Daniel Ponce De Leon KO 5
Reynaldo Lopez

Cabazon, California: After blowing out Rey Bautista in just 2½ minutes in August, powerpunching WBO 122-pound strapholder Ponce De Leon wanted to keep busy, so he signed for a non-title fight at Morongo Casino just seven weeks later, and got in a few rounds of work before polishing off Colombian Lopez late in the fifth round. It wasn't Ponce De Leon's most sparkling performance, but he was efficient and, as is usually the case with the free-swinging lefty, the ending was decisive.

Ponce De Leon, 123½, Huntington Park, California, via Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, came out in search of another quickie, but Lopez, 121½, Miami, Florida, via Cartagena, Colombia, was a tough and crafty fellow southpaw who used his jab and head movement to weather the initial storm. Lopez, 33, had never been kayoed previously, and had been competitive in losing over the distance in recent title fights against Cristian Mijares and Dimitri Kirilov—but one noteworthy fact is that both of those bouts were at 115 pounds. It was inevitable that Ponce De Leon's size and power would overwhelm him.

In round three, the Mexican's power began to tell, as Lopez was stunned late in the round. Lopez did, however, land his best punch of the fight, a left uppercut, as Ponce De Leon was attempting to follow up. But all of the best punches in the fourth round belonged to Ponce De Leon, 27, with his straight left doing damage while Lopez' best counter shots bounced harmlessly off of the bigger man. Ponce De Leon was relatively inactive early in the fifth, which emboldened Lopez, 28-5-2 (19), and played a role in his walking directly into a nasty left hand that left him sprawled out on the canvas. Referee Tony Crebs (USA) called it off midway through the count at 2:39 of the round.

Ponce De Leon, 33-1 (30), will be continuing with his busy schedule, fighting again on the December 8 Floyd Mayweather-Ricky Hatton card before probably traveling to the Philippines in early-2008 for a rematch with Gerry Penalosa. In their first go-round, in March '07, Ponce De Leon took a wide decision in a fight most observers felt could have gone either way.

Television: **Telefutura**
Promoter: **Golden Boy Promotions**
(9-28-07) ■

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[New Faces]

(Continued from Page 26)

shoes. Street violence was rampant. Gangs and bullies had no problem using guns or knives to get their point across.

In the middle of this poverty was Mendez, a tall, lean insecure kid. Mendez tried to avoid confrontation, which sometimes made him an easy target. He would come home covered in welts and bruises, swollen up from getting pounded. The manly code of the street didn't apply to him, he thought. He never fought back.

"I used to get beat up by everybody," Mendez recalled. "I was always getting into streetfights and getting punked. I never liked fighting or getting into trouble. So the other kids used to beat me up. I never liked problems. My father used to get angry at me all of time because I was coming home beat up. I was the errand boy for these kids, kids my age."

Eventually, Mendez' father had had enough. He grabbed his young son by the hand and brought him to a local gym. Argenis was going to learn to defend himself or he was going to die trying.

Four months later, the leader of the gang who used to send Mendez on errands made a comment about someone he shouldn't have. Mendez decked the kid, who remained unconscious for 15 minutes.

"I had to hit the kid," Mendez remembered. "He made a comment about my mother. I had enough. That was it. I *had* to hit him. I remember his eyes rolling back into his head. They had to throw water on him a few times to revive him. It's funny, because no one ever challenged me or sent me on any errands again. After that, I was the one getting the respect from everyone."

These days he has the attention of Nunez, Dunkin, and adviser Miguel Diaz. Dunkin sees some parallels between Mendez and the late Corrales, whom Dunkin once managed.

"But I think Argenis is more of a boxer than Diego was," Dunkin said. "Diego liked to get inside and tear your head off. He never used his height advantage. That's where Mendez is different. He'll use his height and create distance with the jab."

Mendez reminds Diaz of lightweight contender Anifowoshe, who stopped fighting in 1991 after he suffered a blood clot on his brain.

"Argenis' speed and intelligence are natural fits; he's a real pro at an early age, like Akeem was," Diaz said. "Akeem might have been the best fighter I ever worked with, and Argenis is a lot like him, with the way he carries himself and how he prepares. Argenis doesn't have to get motivated. He's a self-starter. He's someone the boxing world better watch out for next year."

For now, those surrounding Mendez are being patient.

"We want to take our time with Argenis," Nunez said. "He's at a stage where he's still learning and still getting better. If it were up to him, Argenis would be fighting more regularly. He'd want to fight Marco Antonio Barrera."

Now it seems everyone who sees Mendez in the gym stops what they're doing to watch him hit the heavybag, or jump rope, or punch the pads, or spar. Maybe a young, aspiring fighter standing off in the corner one afternoon absorbs what Mendez is doing and begins imitating him.

And somewhere, Mendez would like to think, Emiliano Valdez is smiling down on his protégé. ■

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN/RINGSIDE PHOTOS

Mendez strikes out at Rubin Jacoby en route to a decision victory in his second pro fight. Co-managers Cameron Dunkin and Jose Nunez, along with Rank Top, have some big plans in store for the tall junior lightweight from the Dominican Republic.

DON'T MISS

RING UPDATE WITH WILLIAM DETTLOFF

EVERY MONDAY ... EXCLUSIVELY ON: thering-online.com

Always insightful and often provocative, William Dettloff, *The Ring*'s senior writer, is the thinking-fans' columnist, a writer who never settles for the same old stale commentary you've already read a dozen times. For example, here's Dettloff's take on a handful of hot topics:

The dangers of boxing: "Long after you and I and everyone we know are long gone, men will still be fighting one another with their fists, and sometimes bad things will happen as a result. You may feel guilty about that fact if you wish. I will not."

Nicolay Valuev: "He's hairier than Robin Williams and facially looks an awful lot like Lurch from *The Addams Family*. In today's heavyweight division, that can get you a good long way."

The lack of a dominant heavyweight: "When a heavyweight champ is dominant, the only fun comes in wondering when someone will cut him down to size and how. We rush a guy to the top of the mountain just for the pleasure of watching him get knocked off."

Dettloff on thering-online.com ... The perfect way to answer the week's opening bell!

4748/05.06

Light Heavyweight Bout

Felix Trinidad

Main Event 12 Rounds

Roy Jones

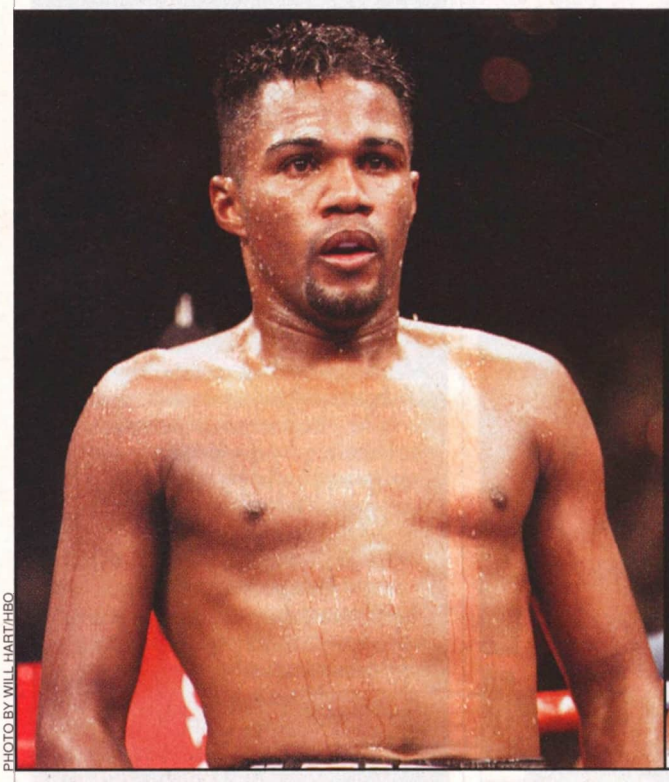


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

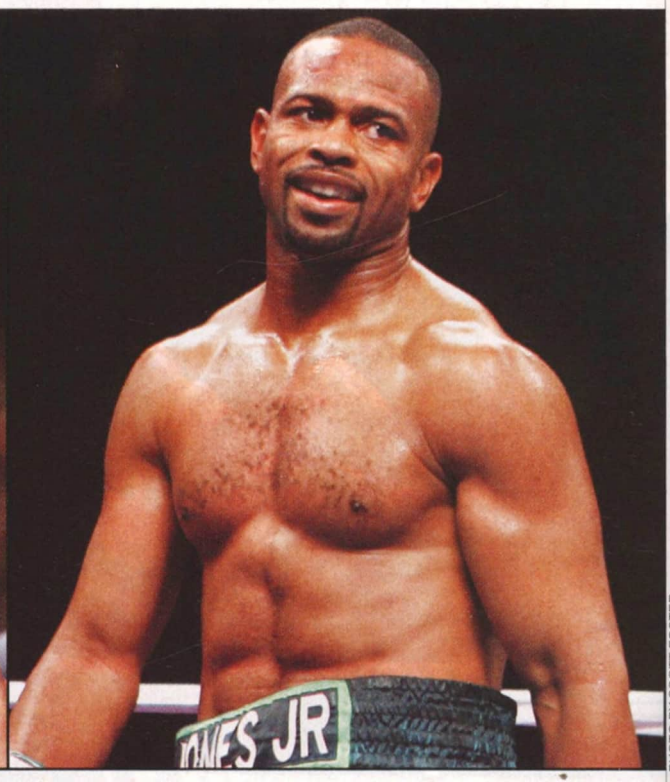


PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER

Aging and faded stars Felix "Tito" Trinidad and Roy Jones collide on January 19 at Madison Square Garden in a match that would have created far more interest had it been made seven or eight years ago. Whether they are trying to recapture the magic of their youth or attempting to cash in on their fame depends of your point of view. But it is clearly a bout that relies entirely on name recognition to attract customers, as neither fighter has scored a significant victory in more than five years.

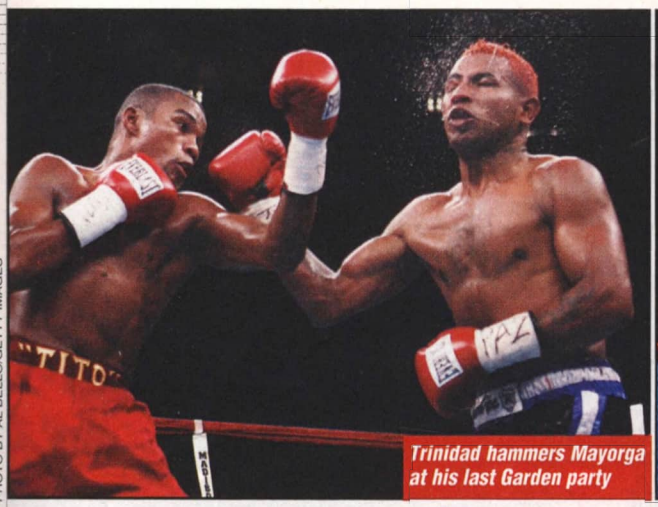
There is always the chance that one or maybe both fighters will be capable of conjuring up one final great performance. If that happens, fans will be in for a treat, as Jones and Trinidad will be first-ballot Hall of Famers five years after their final fights.

If recent history is any indicator, Trinidad's loyal fans will turn out in large numbers, which will make for an electric atmosphere at the Garden. It remains to be seen if the participants can live up the audience's expectations, but as this is most likely the last big payday for one of them, a supreme effort by both is not outside of the realm of possibility.

Felix Trinidad

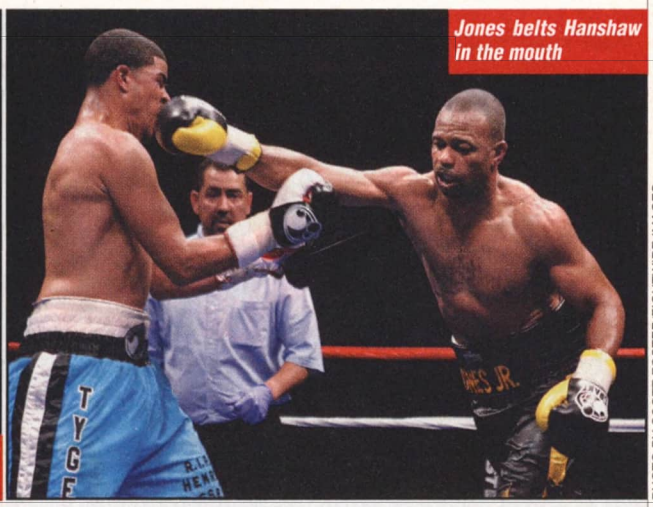
Roy Jones

Record and World Rating



Trinidad hammers Mayorga at his last Garden party

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES



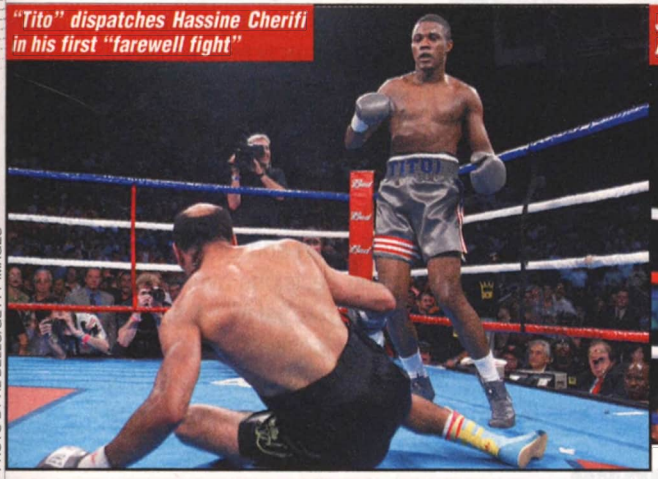
Jones belts Hanshaw in the mouth

PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Is 42-2 with 35 knockouts ... Turned pro in March 1990 following a 51-6 amateur career that included five Puerto Rican National Championships ... Won IBF welterweight title in June '93 ... Added WBC strap in '99 ... Moved up to junior middle and grabbed WBA belt in March 2000 and IBF version in July ... Moved up again and captured WBA middleweight title in May 2001 ... Lost WBA 160-pound crown and undefeated record in September '01 ... Not ranked by THE RING.

Is 51-4 with 39 knockouts ... Climax of 121-13 amateur career was spoiled by scandalous decision in the 1984 Olympics, where he was robbed of the gold medal ... Turned pro in May 1989 and won the vacant IBF middleweight title in May '93 ... Moved up and annexed the IBF super middle title in November '94 ... Took the WBC light heavyweight belt in '96, lost it, and regained it in '97 ... Won IBF belt to unify and claim world 175-pound title in '99 ... Lost world light heavyweight title in May '04 ... Not ranked by THE RING.

Age and Physical Equipment



"Tito" dispatches Hassine Cherifi in his first "farewell fight"

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Jones bangs Badi Ajamu's body

PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER

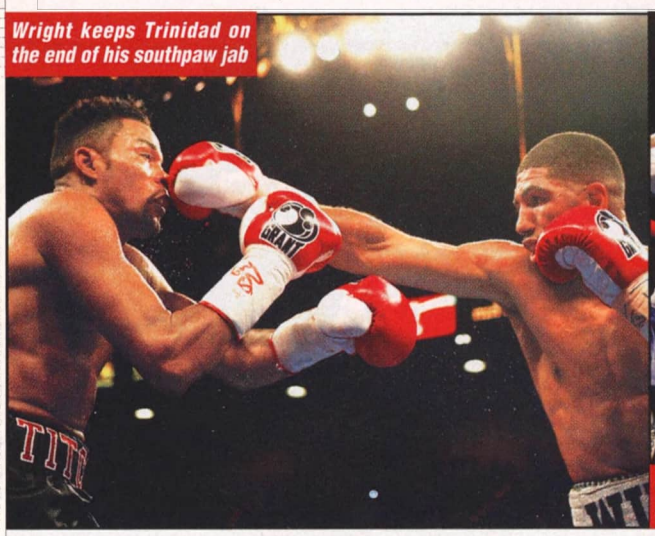
Will have turned 35 by fight time ... Stands 5'11" with a 72-inch reach ... Has never weighed more than 160 pounds for a match, so fighting at light heavy will be a new challenge, especially as best results have come at welter ... Reflexes and timing hampered by age and layoffs ... Chin so-so at best, as evidenced by numerous career knockdowns.

Will be three days past his 39th birthday when he fights Trinidad ... Stands 5'11" with a 74-inch reach ... Superhuman speed and incredible hand-eye coordination are things of the past ... Chin a major liability since '04 ... Power has declined along with skills, with last knockout victory coming in '02 ... Can still box 12 rounds at a reasonably fast pace.

Felix Trinidad

Roy Jones

Best Weapons



Wright keeps Trinidad on the end of his southpaw jab

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Jones tags Tarver in their first fight

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

The murderous left hook that wrecked so many foes in the past has been in mothballs for so long it's difficult to know whether or not it's still one of the game's most destructive punches ... Rest of arsenal has always been good, but secondary to hook ... Courage, resiliency, and determination have served him well in the past ... Excellent finisher when foe is in trouble.

Currently relying more on left jab and bodyshots than during his prime ... Still too quick and clever for ordinary opponents ... Good boxing instincts ... Multi-punch combinations have been replaced by rapid-fire one-twos ... Inflated ego that keep him in the game also contributes to positive attitude during bouts ... Reputation still renders some opponents awestruck.

Previous Fight

Was virtually shut out by Winky Wright on May 14, 2005, losing a unanimous decision by tallies of 120-107 and 119-108 (twice), after which he announced his retirement yet again ... Couldn't get past Wright's southpaw jab or find the range for his big guns ... Also penalized a point in the ninth round for repeated low blows.

Boxed his way to a unanimous 12-round decision over previously unbeaten Anthony Hanshaw on June 14, 2007, by scores of 114-113, 117-110, and 118-109 ... Came off the ropes with quick right in the 11th round, followed by a combination, to stagger and then drop Hanshaw for a count in bout's only real highlight.

Quality of Opposition

Signature victories over Fernando Vargas (KO 12), David Reid (W 12), Oscar De La Hoya (W 12), Hector Camacho (W 12), and Pernell Whitaker (W 12) seem like ancient history and have been eclipsed by losses to Bernard Hopkins (KO by 12) and Wright (L 12) ... Comeback kayo of wide-open Ricardo Mayorga in October 2004 was most recent win.

Has bounced back from disastrous defeats against Antonio Tarver (KO by 2, L 12) and Glen Johnson (KO by 9) with a pair of 12-round decisions over ordinary Prince Badi Ajamu and Hanshaw ... Salad days were studded with quality victories over Hopkins (W 12), James Toney (W 12), Virgil Hill (KO 4), Eric Harding (KO 10), Clinton Woods (KO 6), and John Ruiz (W 12).

Defense

Always relatively easy to hit, but during prime years devastating offense kept opponents wary of taking too many risks ... Has never really taken advantage of height and reach to box at range behind the jab ... Chin iffy at best, but showed resiliency rebounding from numerous knockdowns during lengthy welterweight reign.

Super-quick reflexes have diminished to a point where he can no longer avoid punches with radar-like anticipation and subtle shifts ... Now employs legs to stay out of range while looking to potshot ... Also knows how to cover up effectively when backed into the ropes ... Easier to tag than in the past, but still reasonably evasive.

Felix Trinidad

Roy Jones

Style

Trinidad has De La Hoya covering up

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Has always been an aggressive stalker, eager to unload big punches to head and body, and has shown no inclination to modify style due to age ... Left hook still potent, as are all of his powerpunches, including uppercuts from both hands and straight right ... Dangerous when hurt ... Not adept at adjusting mid-fight.

Still motors around the ring on sprightly legs, just not as quickly as before ... Offensive bursts are effective, but no longer of the spectacular variety or as frequent ... Tendency to showboat has remained despite diminished skills ... Seems even more content than ever to coast to decisions instead of pressing for kayo.

Jones couldn't handle Johnson's pressure and punch

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

The Questions

Can he shed 2½ years of rust and fight anywhere near his best? Is there any way he can land his left hook? Will Jones simply be too quick for him? Will he retire permanently if he loses?

Will his chin withstand the impact if Trinidad connects with a flush hook? Will he fade under steady pressure? Will a large pro-Trinidad crowd fluster him? Can he become the second man to stop Trinidad?

The Outcome

Trinidad looks even worse than he did against Wright, and Jones legs out a comparatively one-sided, safety-first decision in a fight void of highlights or excitement. Pay-per-view customers question their sanity.

May 1986

COVER STORY: "Marvelous Marvin Tames The Beast" is Las Vegas correspondent Jack Welsh's account of Hagler's grueling knockout of John Mugabi in front of a capacity crowd of 15,245 at Caesars Palace. It had been almost a year since Hagler's classic confrontation with Tommy Hearns, and while the Mugabi fight wasn't as explosive, it was a taxing struggle in which Hagler was forced to absorb considerable punishment prior to prevailing.

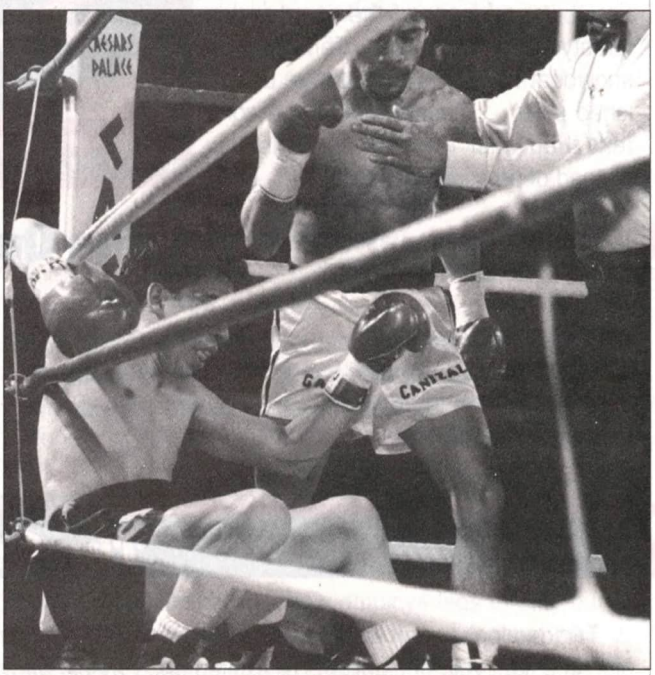
"Before the bald-pated titleholder from Brockton, Massachusetts, disposed of Mugabi with a knockout at 1:29 of the 11th round, Mickey Duff's 1980 Olympic discovery out of Kampala, Uganda, swapped his alleged kayo power for some pretty good counterpunching, leaving Hagler with an acorn-like, closing right eye, and spittles of blood on his lower lip," wrote Welsh.

Hearns, who was gunning for a rematch with Hagler, fought on the undercard, blasting out James Shuler in the first round with a "10-punch blitzkrieg." But Hagler didn't sound very interested in tangling with Hearns again.

"I refuse to commit myself to anything until I go home and take a little rest," said Hagler at the postfight press conference.

In retrospect, neither Hagler nor Mugabi were ever quite the same following their punishing encounter. Hagler lost a close decision to Ray Leonard in his next fight and then retired. Mugabi fought on until 1999, but except for a brief reign as WBC junior middleweight titleholder, he never achieved the status he enjoyed going into the Hagler fight.

"Too Close For Comfort" is Welsh's report on the near-tragic WBA bantamweight title fight between Richie Sandoval and Gaby Canizales, which took place on the Hagler-Mugabi undercard.



Sandoval is in desperate trouble

World Champions

(for the period ended March 10, 1986)

Heavyweight: Michael Spinks
Cruiserweight: Bernard Benton
Light Heavyweight: vacant
Middleweight: Marvin Hagler
Junior Middleweight: Thomas Hearns
Welterweight: Donald Curry
Lightweight: vacant
Junior Lightweight: Wilfredo Gomez
Featherweight: Barry McGuigan
Junior Featherweight: vacant
Bantamweight: Gaby Canizales
Flyweight: Sot Chitalada

"Sandoval was rushed to Valley Hospital unconscious after Canizales' final salvo sent him into a seizure at 2:47 of the seventh round," wrote Welsh. "There was no count from referee Carlos Padilla as he and ringside physician Dr. Flip Homansky worked to revive Sandoval, who lost for the first time after 29 straight victories, 17 by knockout."

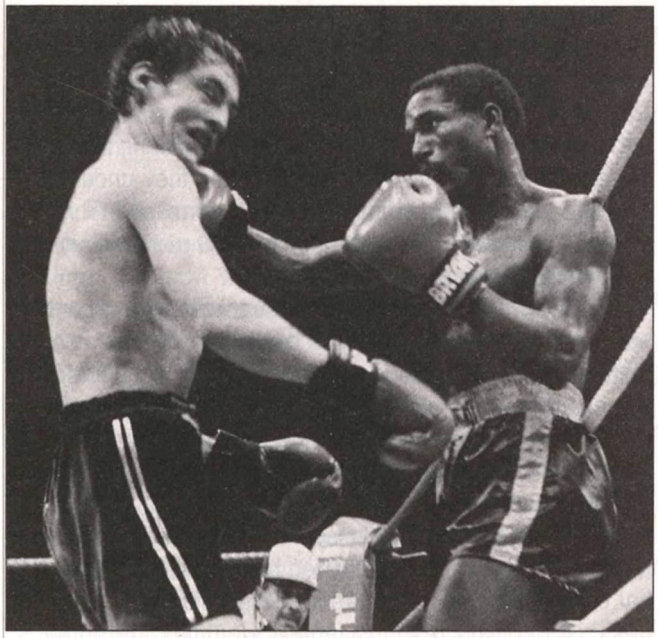
Sandoval was removed from intensive care the day following the fight, but never fought again. He eventually went to work for Top Rank. Three months later, Canizales lost the WBC strap to Bernardo Pinango in his first defense.

"Old Pops Just Keeps Rolling Along" by Phill Marder explains that despite the fact that Marvin Johnson had recently stopped Leslie Stewart to win the vacant WBA light heavyweight title—making the 31-year-old Indianapolis veteran the first to win (a piece) of the 175-pound title three times—he still had to work as a corrections officer between bouts to support his wife and four children. The problem was that Johnson's previous two reigns both ended when he lost the title in his first defense. The left-handed slugger was only slightly more successful the third time around, making one successful defense before losing the belt back to Stewart.

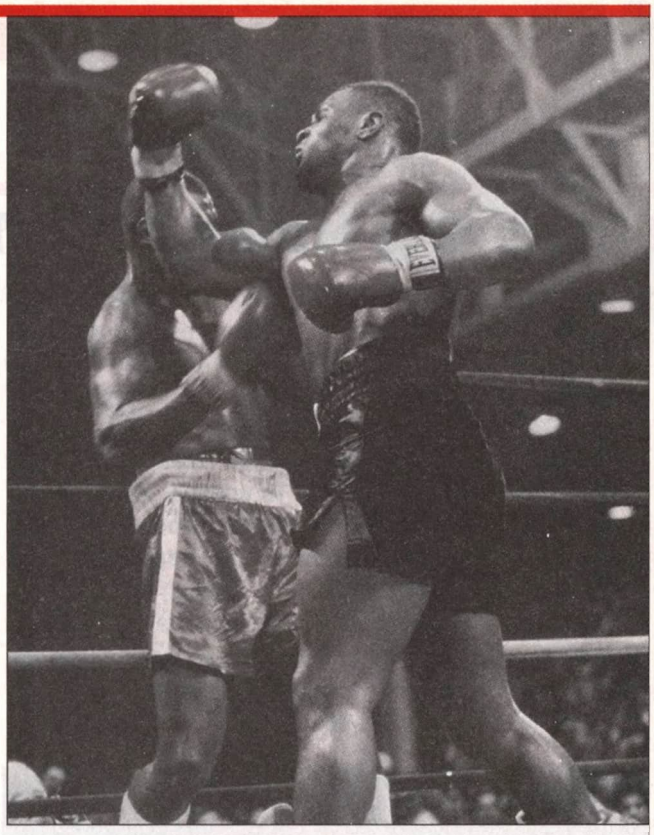
"McGuigan's Dublin Donnybrook" is Irish writer Jack Magowan's story of Dublin's first title fight in 63 years, which was supposed to be a relatively easy defense for WBA featherweight titleholder Barry McGuigan. But unsung Danilo Cabrera, who took the bout on short notice when original challenger Fernando Sosa was injured in training, ended up giving the local hero an unexpectedly demanding tussle.

"The 'Clones Cyclone' scarcely blew harder than a gentle breeze," wrote Magowan. "Put another way, he made a four-course meal out of what should have been an hors d'oeuvre."

McGuigan finally stopped Cabrera in the 14th round, but by then, Barry had a black eye and a cut on his cheek that would require six stitches. McGuigan's performance foreshadowed the future, as he lost the title to Steve Cruz in his very next fight.



Cabrera catches McGuigan with a right



Tyson fires a ferocious uppercut at Ferguson

"The Battle Of Troy" documents Mike Tyson's knockout of Jesse Ferguson in front of a capacity crowd of 7,600 at the RCI Fieldhouse in Troy, New York. Although he had yet to win his first belt, Tyson-mania was already at a fever pitch, and ABC televised the event live.

"From the onset, Ferguson wore a look of desperation," wrote Editor-in-Chief Nigel Collins. "And who could blame him? There he was, trapped in a 20-foot ring with a guy one opponent described as fighting 'like you'd just said something nasty about his mother.'"

It was after Tyson dispatched Ferguson in the fifth round that he unleashed one of his most famous quotes: "I wanted to catch him right on the tip of the nose because I wanted to try to push the bone into the brain."

"The Pit Bull Bites The Butterfly" details Livingstone Bramble's 13th-round TKO of Tyrone "Butterfly" Crawley to tally his second defense of the WBA lightweight title. Due to his speed and slick boxing style, quite a few figured the challenger might take the belt, and Nevada sports books had the bout listed as 6-5 pick-'em. But Crawley simply wasn't strong enough to withstand Bramble's grinding attack and powerpunches.

"Livingstone viciously put the bite on Tyrone's ribs, and the latter's flailing combinations were little more than the irritating work of an ambitious gnat," wrote the ubiquitous Jack Welsh. ■

The Fight Doctor

By Margaret Goodman, M.D.

Inquiring Minds Want To Know

Doctors are often curb-sided for free medical advice, but boxing doctors are hit with questions of a different kind. Here are just a few thrown at me over the last few months.

Fernando Vargas postponed his September 8 fight against Ricardo Mayorga due to anemia. Reports now say it was from too much aspirin. Does that make sense? I have never heard of this happening to a healthy boxer before.

Very few boxers are tested for anemia. In fact, it is extremely unusual in young males, unlike women who frequently become anemic as a result of heavy menstruation. So, in a man, and especially an athlete, it is of great concern.

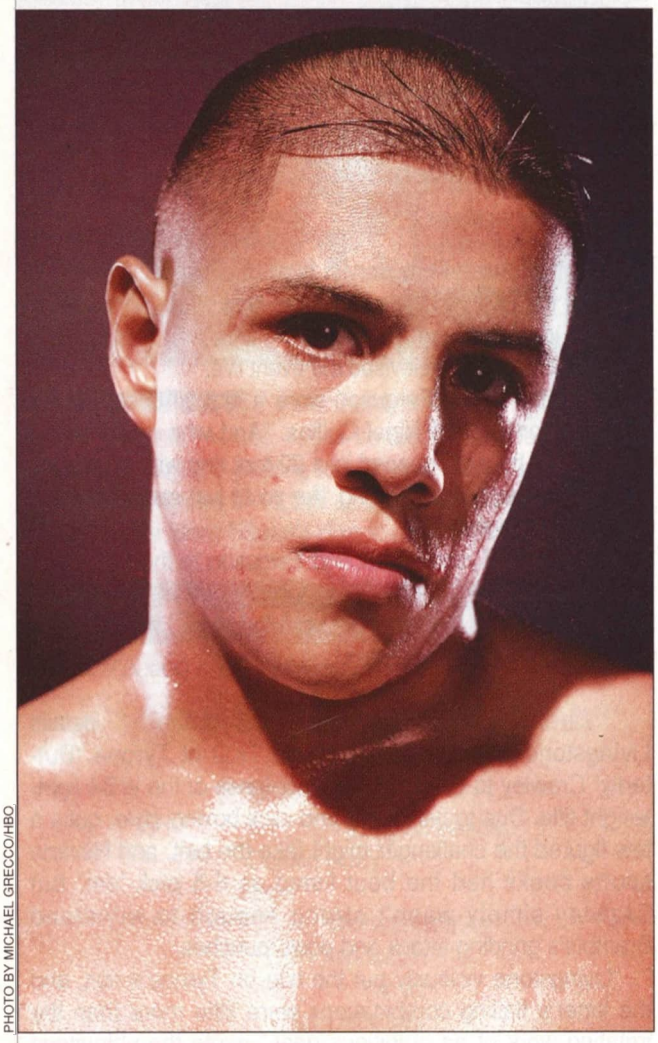


PHOTO BY MICHAEL GRECCO/HBO

Why was Vargas taking so many aspirins?

The most common reason for male anemia is blood loss, which can result in an iron deficiency. Oxygen is carried to our organs by our blood cells. It stands to reason that without adequate oxygenation, a boxer could never successfully endure a tough bout.

I have been warning boxers about aspirin for years. Not only can it contribute to stomach ulcers, but it also increases an athlete's susceptibility to bleeding from cuts, the nose, and in the brain.

In this instance, an even greater question is why Vargas was taking so much aspirin, and is that condition incompatible with a boxing career?

After a knockdown, when the ring doctor checks the fighter between rounds, I often see them ask dumb questions like, "What day is it?" What should they ask? I also see ring doctors using a penlight to examine a kayoed fighter or check a boxer in the corner. What is the purpose of that?

The ring physician has less than a minute between rounds, so he must be prepared. The date, while a routine question asked by doctors assessing a patient's mental state, isn't sufficient during a fight. One of the country's finest ring physicians, Nevada's Dr. Damon Zavala, stresses the importance of asking appropriate questions.

"I will give short, simple commands for the boxer to follow," said Dr. Zavala. "I avoid questions that may result in confusing answers like, 'Where are we right now?' Instead, I try to give them simple tasks like, 'Open your mouth. Look at me. Raise your arms."

All too frequently a ring physician will say, "Are you okay?" Pat responses such as, "I'm fine" or nodding is almost a reflex and certainly doesn't certify comprehension. Asking the boxer to perform a simple task will make certain they understand and that they can appropriately follow a command. This will insure both sides of their brain are functioning and will enable you to assess their level of alertness.

Moreover, Dr. Zavala makes an excellent point regarding speaking to a fighter in his native language. How can a physician adequately examine anyone if they don't speak the same language? Ringside interpreters are typically available, but if possible, an independent/unbiased interpreter should be utilized, as translations from even the most conscientious cornermen could be shaded.

A penlight solves multiple issues: 1) It immediately draws the fighter's focus to you; 2) It can be used without any verbal communication and lessens the physician's obtrusiveness; 3) pupillary responsiveness identifies the fighter's

alertness, and unequal pupils require an immediate stoppage as they can indicate acute brain injury until proven otherwise.

There has been a great deal written about the change in glove size. What is your take on this? Does it make sense, and why the change now?

In 2006, in an effort to reduce catastrophic boxing injuries, the Nevada State Athletic Commission began requiring that boxers competing 135 pounds and above use 10-ounce gloves. Traditionally, fighters competing at 147 and above used the heavier gloves. This was not a legislative change, but an arbitrary one made with good intentions based on incomplete facts.

Yes, it is true that most of the recent boxing deaths have occurred while fighters competed in eight-ounce gloves. However, boxing deaths are multifactorial and, secondly, gloves are designed to protect a fighter's hands, not his opponent's head! Increasing the weight of the glove (and the padding over the hand) in a weight class where many more headshots are already thrown will only increase the susceptibility of these fighters to brain injury.

The NSAC will have regulatory hearings this fall before the glove change becomes part of state statute. Therefore, fighters and the public have the right to contest this. So far, no one has.

Are there medical reasons why lighter-weight fighters have shorter careers?

Yes. In boxing, size really does matter. On average, lighter-weight fighters spar and fight more often and throw more punches. This leads to wear and tear on the body and brain. As a result, a boxer's reflexes and cognitive processes slow. Making weight is another factor. Aging lighter-weight boxers, just like the rest of us, have increasing difficulty maintaining weight and low body fat. Yo-yo diets, restricting fluids, and abusing medications to assist in weight loss can beat up a fighter more than any opponent. Furthermore, these methods often backfire, as his body can no longer tolerate the drastic changes.

In his Atlantic City fight against Alfonso Gomez, Arturo Gatti suffered a bad cut on his upper lip. Even though the fight was stopped due to repeated punishment, could he have continued with that gash?

New Jersey has some of the best officials in the country, and although it is difficult to make an absolute decision without being present, I can say with good certainty that the fight would have been stopped on that laceration alone. The cut went through both sides of the lip and extended beyond the vermilion border (the colored part of the lip). This is a very difficult area to suture and prone to infection. Poor wound closure in this area can lead to facial deformities, including an inability to properly close the mouth, chew, and talk.

A fight should be stopped on a cut if allowing the contest to continue would result in irreparable harm. This was one of those lacerations.

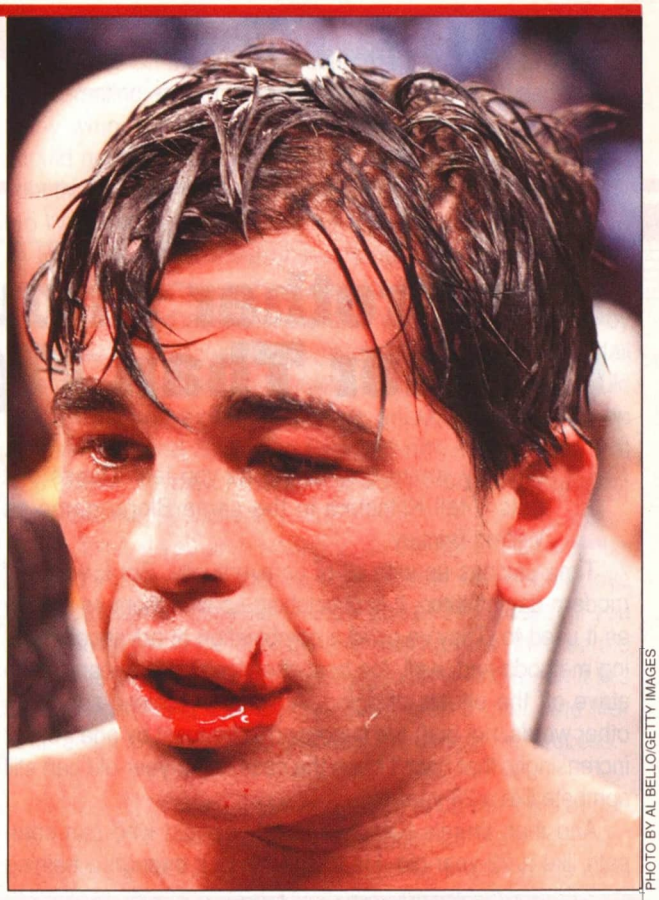


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

A cut such as Gatti's should always end a fight

Many mixed martial artists, such as Randy Couture, are competing well into their mid-40s, but when a boxer such as Evander Holyfield or Ray Mercer decides to continue their career, everyone is up in arms. That doesn't seem fair. Should there be a different standard for MMA and boxing competitors?

It is impossible to deny age as a factor in boxing performance and when a fighter should retire. MMA fighters typically begin their career as college wrestlers, which is a much later than the average boxer. Once the athlete turns to MMA, he has taken considerably fewer punches to the head. Punches can be cumulative in the short and long term, so it makes sense that an MMA fighter would have less ring age than a boxer of similar chronological years.

I do agree there seems to be a different standard between MMA and boxing for a number of reasons, but MMA fighters are now competing more often, and are incorporating more boxing into their training and competitions. Therefore, if I had to predict, head injuries will remain less in MMA, but the gap will shorten as time goes on.

Although retirement is a subject no commission likes to deal with, it is a fact of life for both sports, and needs to be considered when approving every fighter to compete, irrespective of his specialty. ■

By Jim Bagg

Big Brother Should Be Watching (Rather Than Fighting)

They say you're only as old as you feel. Guess that puts Vitali Klitschko in the same Bingo game as Wilfred Brimley.

Time catches up with all of us eventually. But for a lot of modern-day athletes, it isn't catching up with them as quickly as it used to. They've used a combination of advanced training methods and, well, the best chemicals money can buy to stave off the effects of aging. Athletes in athletic sports (in other words, not golf) are supposed to be toast by age 40, but increasingly, that hasn't been the case. A 42-year-old can still compete like a 28-year-old.

And then there's Klitschko, a 36-year-old who can compete like a 72-year-old. He hasn't made it through a training camp without suffering a major injury since he was 33. In those three years since beating up Danny Williams on December 11, 2004, he's been aging in dog years. Hey, Vitali, the Baggmeister knows it sucks. El Baggiachi knows first-hand what it feels like to have your back go out on a violent sneeze, or to blow out your knee tying a shoelace. As those two living, breathing corpses Jagger and Richards can tell you, it most definitely is a drag getting old. But eventually, you have to accept it. And that time has come for you, Big Brother Ironfist. It's time to hang 'em up. For your sake, and for boxing's sake.

Klitschko was supposed to fight Hasim Rahman on April 30, 2005, but a thigh injury pushed the date back. It was resched-

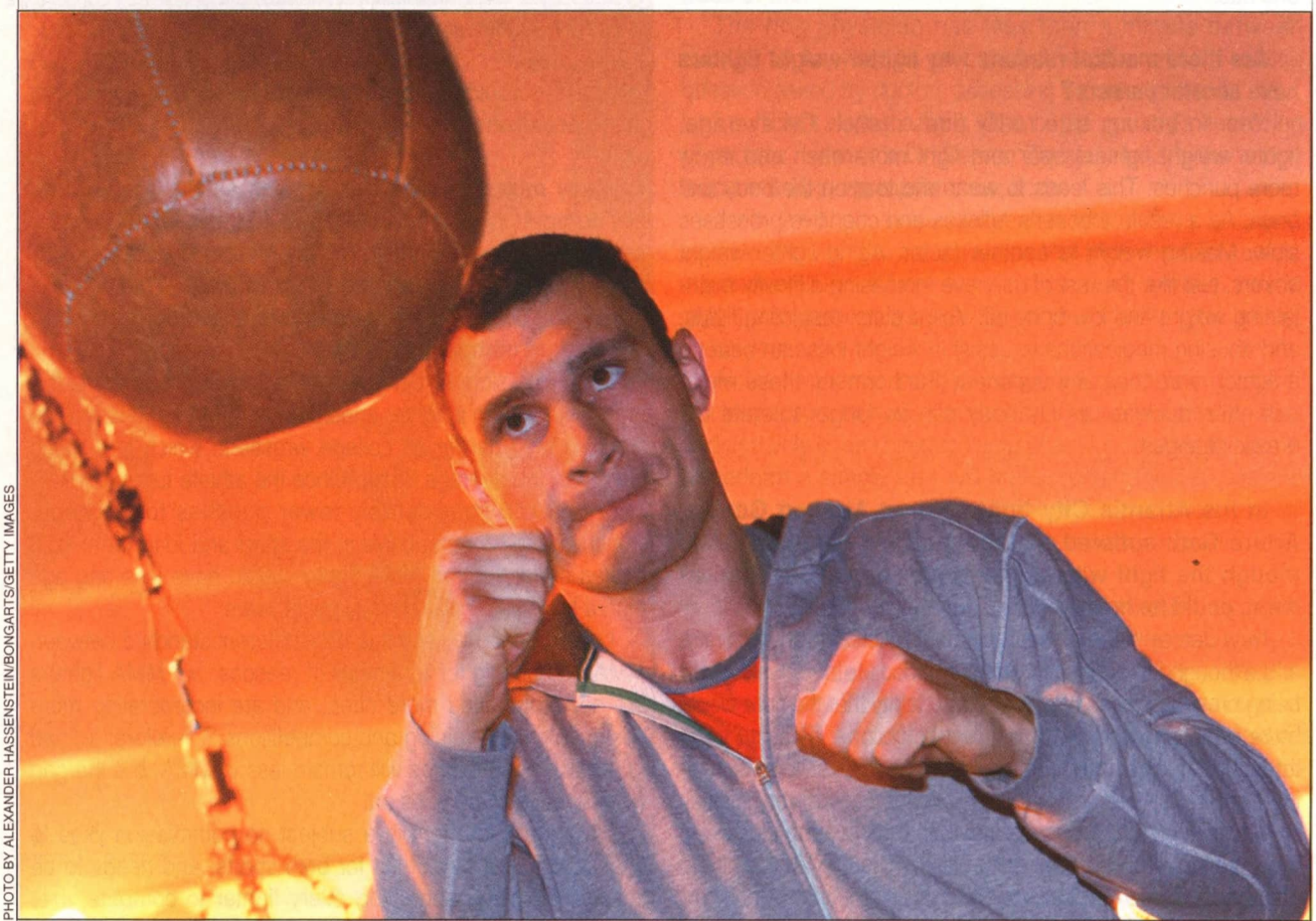


PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Vitali en route to latest injury

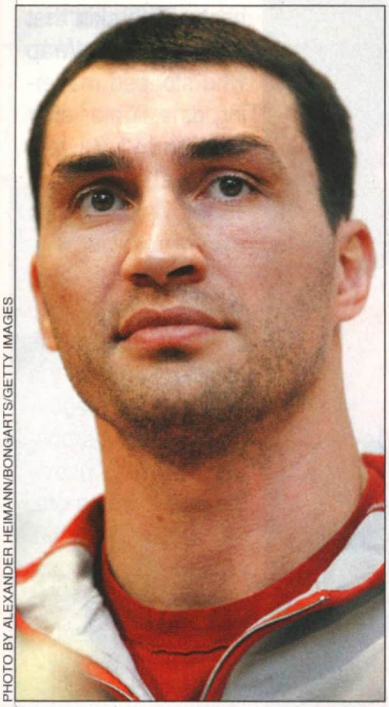


PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HEIMANN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

When will it be my turn?

uled for June 18 ... but the thigh wasn't healing well, so it got bumped to July 23. Then Vitali hurt his back and needed surgery. So the fight was moved to November 12. And before long, big bro tore the ACL and meniscus in his knee during sparring, underwent more surgery, and called it quits.

Undoubtedly, he didn't want to retire, but his body gave him no real choice. He listened to what those creaky old bones and big but fragile muscles had to say. He handled it with class, and even said, "I would like to end my career at its peak, so I am retiring now as the champion to clear the way for my successors."

So much for that noble cause. Vitali's successors—his brother Wladimir, Samuel Peter, Oleg Maskaev, Ruslan Chagaev, etc.—were doing their best to sort out the heavyweight mess. Until, that is, Vitali decided he wanted to fight again, showing no regard whatsoever for his successors and proceeding to freeze the progress of the heavyweight division for almost all of 2007. And, of course, while preparing for his return fight against Jameel McCline, Klitschko re-injured his back, requiring arthroscopic surgery. That makes five postponements in a row for Dr. Tinsel-Ligaments. The Baggifornia doesn't know what kind of baseball they play in the Ukraine, but over here, it's three strikes and you're out. Klitschko is two strikes past that now. And it's time he accept that it's all over and head on back to the dugout.

Unfortunately, the geniuses at Showtime thought it would be a good idea to run a poll during the October 6 Peter-McCline fight asking viewers whether they'd rather see the winner face Big V, or "The Big O," Maskaev. Of course, since Maskaev is about as interesting as a stale loaf of bread, Klitschko was the runaway winner, which he'll probably take as a sign that he should get right back into training so he can further stall the fight that hardcore fans really want to see, Peter against baby bro Wladimir.

Peter-Maskaev should have happened this past spring, setting up Wladimir vs. the winner for late-'07. Instead, we're currently looking at Peter-Maskaev in early-'08, followed by the winner against Vitali in the middle of the year, unless Vitali gets injured again, which he certainly will, meaning we should see the heavyweight title picture actually get cleared up sometime around 2012. The Bagglesworth doesn't have that kind of time. Literally. Five more years is a long time to expect this liver to keep functioning.

So, Vitali, if you aren't going to do the right thing for yourself and your family (including your brother, who'd really love to get out from under your shadow one of these days), if you aren't going to do the right thing for boxing fans, then do the right thing for Old McBaggald. Say goodbye, and mean it this time. Then have a seat on the couch, grab a beer, and kick your feet up. And try not to dislocate anything in the process.

Kids Today ... As long as we're on the topic of getting old and/or feeling old, the Baggquaman really feels like an old fart when he sees boxing matches involving the sons of fighters who were in their primes when the Baggelangelo was *already* old. Seriously, how is it possible that the Baggosaurus is still around to watch Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. and Ronald Hearns punching people in the face? (It seems

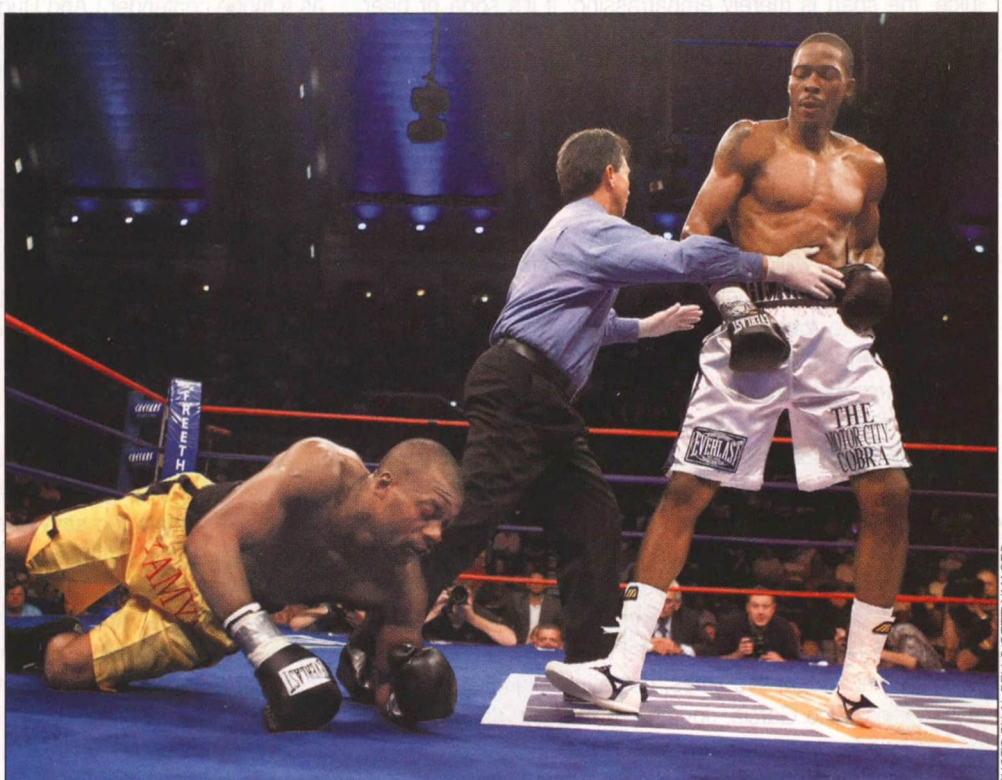


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Could Hearns do to Chavez Jr. what he did to Robert Kamya?

especially odd because their dads were still active boxers until about five minutes ago.)

Well, as long as "The Cub Of Culiacan" and "The Hit Boy" are bothering with pro careers, His Baggnificence must admit, it warms his barely beating heart to hear rumors that the two of them may face each other next year. Just close your eyes and picture the billboard: "CHAVEZ vs. HEARNS." The only thing better would be a billboard that read "MANSFIELD vs. MONROE."

(Hold on a minute. Let's just linger on that image for a few more moments before proceeding.)

Anyway, the Baggronicity figures if you have a big name—even if it was your old man who built it—you may as well use it. If Ali vs. Frazier can be the most lucrative *women's* fight there ever was, certainly there's nothing wrong with the Hearns kid and the Chavez kid putting their names together to profit off of nostalgia. Will it make all of us old-timers feel even older? Probably. But it's still Hearns vs. Chavez. Sounds like a fun little *Boxing After Dark* co-feature.

Let's just hope they don't take the son-of-a-legend thing too far and make Arthur Mercante Jr. the ref.

PHOTO BY JAVIER CENTENO/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

The only person Marquez is fooling is himself

Get Real, Raul: Where the Baggfurter is from, we call it a "snarf" when you're drinking something, you laugh while drinking it, and the beverage comes out your nose. If it's water or juice, the snarf is merely embarrassing; if it's soda or beer, the snarf can be kind of painful. So Raul Marquez, the Baggalama has a bone to pick with you for causing him to snarf his Heineken with your absurd and hilarious comments that Kelly Pavlik should be defending his newly captured middleweight championship against you first.

"I want to congratulate Kelly Pavlik on his big win over Jermain Taylor," Marquez told the press, "and I respect his attitude of being willing to fight all comers. Hopefully, he'll live up to those claims by fighting a true contender like me, and not one of the rookies out there like Sergio Mora or John Duddy. I respect those kids, but they've never fought any contenders, they don't have the resume to deserve a title shot like I do, and they don't even want to fight me. If Kelly Pavlik wants to fight the best available contender, that's me."

Where do we begin picking apart Marquez' statement? Not only isn't Marquez the best available contender, but he might not be in the top 50, and he certainly comes in behind both Mora and Duddy. Since June 2004, when Marquez lost every second of every round en route to being stopped by a still-developing Taylor—the same fighter Pavlik just knocked out—Marquez has fought five times, defeating Miguel Hernandez, Sergio Rios, Elco Garcia, Jonathan Corn, and Jay Pina. The best-known (and perhaps the most capable) fighter of that ragtag bunch is Hernandez, who was the worst fighter on the latest season of *The Contender*. Marquez is a 36-year-old broadcaster with skin that tears like Saran Wrap who stopped mattering as a fighter after Fernando Vargas dominated him in 1999, and he thinks that five straight wins against Stumblebum Row qualify him to fight the number-one middleweight on the planet? Sorry, pal.

Mora could probably stand to prove himself a little more, but he's undefeated, with wins in the past three years over Ishe Smith, Peter Manfredo, Archak Termeliksetian, and Eric Regan, all of whom are better than anyone Marquez has defeated since Shibata Flores in 1998. (Yes, it's been *nine flippin' years* since Marquez' last win over so much as a fringe contender.) And Duddy is basically just a well-marketed potato can (that's the Irish version of a tomato can), but he too is undefeated, and he did beat Yory Boy Campas, the same guy who ended Marquez' title reign a decade ago.

If Marquez wants to keep fighting, that's his prerogative. But nobody needs to see Kelly Pavlik smear his face all over the canvas. Pavlik-Mora and Pavlik-Duddy are marketable mismatches. Pavlik-Marquez is an unmarketable slaughter that any responsible commission would refuse to allow.

It's bad enough that Marquez caused beer to spray out of the world's greatest boxing columnist's nose. He doesn't need to compound the problem by letting several pints of blood spray out of his own.

It's Best Not To Be Best: Who at lightweight does everybody want to fight? World champ Joel Casamayor? Nah, too savvy and dirty. Juan Diaz? Nah, too suffocating and relentless. Julio Diaz? Nah, too skillful and versatile. But David Diaz? Ah, perfect. He's the porridge Goldilocks chose. And he's the porridge of choice for all of the huge names moving up from junior lightweight.

There's just something about being average and holding a crummy alphabet belt that the superstars can't resist, which is why Erik Morales targeted (and probably deserved the decision against) the least of the three Diazes for his last fight, and it's why Manny Pacquiao's people suspiciously

mention only one 135-pounder, despite the fact that several others would make for bigger fights.

Should Diaz be insulted that everyone's lining up to relieve him of his green belt? The Baggareeno says no. Who has time to be insulted when you're that busy counting money?

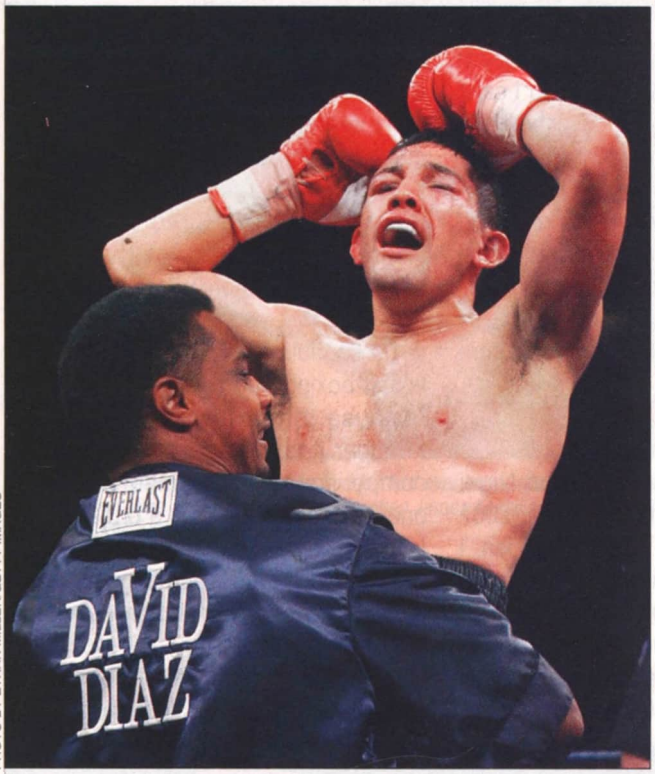


PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

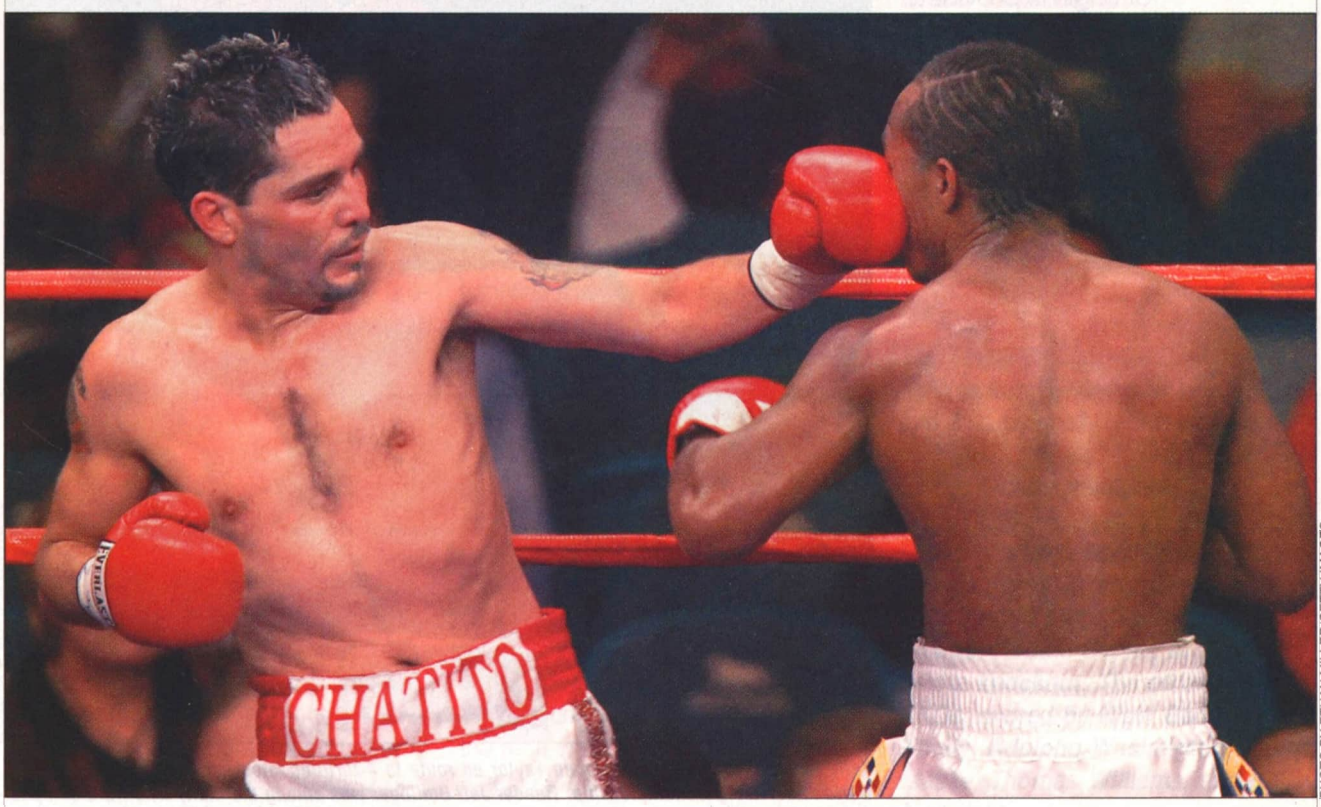
Why is everybody picking on me?

And The Stingray Goes To ... Javier Jauregui, who, despite a brief alphabet title reign a few years back, is a classic journeyman, and he pulled off a classic upset against an undefeated fighter in September. At 51-14-2 (35), Jauregui wasn't supposed to slow the ascent of Adrian Mora, 19-0 (13). But Stingray Awards are all about things that aren't supposed to happen happening. Put another way, fights aren't decided on paper; they're decided in the ring. And Stingrays are won in the ring ... even though, technically, winners are revealed on paper.

In a fight that was close through seven rounds, Mora forgot the cardinal rule in the eighth: "Protect yourself at all times." He also forgot the rule, "Know the difference between a fist and a rope." Coming out of a clinch along the ropes, Mora complained that Jauregui hit him in the back of the head, but referee Jon Schorle informed Mora that it was actually the top rope that hit him. As Mora complained, the Mexican veteran pounced, knocking him down with a left hand to the side of the face. Mora got up, and again started complaining about being fouled. So Jauregui again decided that would be an excellent time to smack Mora upside the head. A left and a right put him down again, and Schorle waved off the fight.

Who needs an alphabet title, right, Javier? You have yourself a shiny Stingray Award. And the best part of all: The Bagglin' Oat Bran won't even make you pay a sanctioning fee. ■

Jim Bagg will begin running his "Monthly Mailbagg" in the next issue of THE RING. Send your criticism, praise, comments, or questions to Baggmeister@yahoo.com.



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Stingray winner Jauregui takes a poke at Joan Guzman

Come Out Writing

Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, THE RING, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034.

Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.

Throwback Champion

Webster defines "havoc" as great destruction and devastation, and I can't think of a better way to describe Kelly Pavlik's off-the-mat comeback demolition of Jermain Taylor. Pavlik is a throwback with a will to win that's reserved only for boxers that are special. I don't plan on missing any of his fights.

JEFF BOLLINGER
jffbollinger@yahoo.com

Opposing Viewpoints, Part I

I would like to comment on Nigel Collins' editorial in the December 2007 edition of THE RING. As a boxing fan, I cannot condemn Michael Vick for his involvement with dog fighting. Personally, I have no issue or opinion on dog fighting. I have never seen a dog fight, but I have watched too many boxing matches that were one-sided. I have also watched, and enjoyed, battles where one of the fighters were regrettably seriously hurt or killed. To condemn Mr. Vick would be hypocritical.

I do have a problem with the way the dogs were tortured and killed. There was no need for that and I believe that is where most of the outrage lies. We, as fans of boxing, have to be careful of our opinions here. We watch boxing and read this magazine because of our love for the sport. Whether it is the art of boxing or the competition of two human beings in one-on-one combat, it is a brutal sport. I believe it was the late Jack Newfield who stated boxing was his guilty pleasure. I think we can all agree on that statement.

AARON BATTALINI
Economy, PA

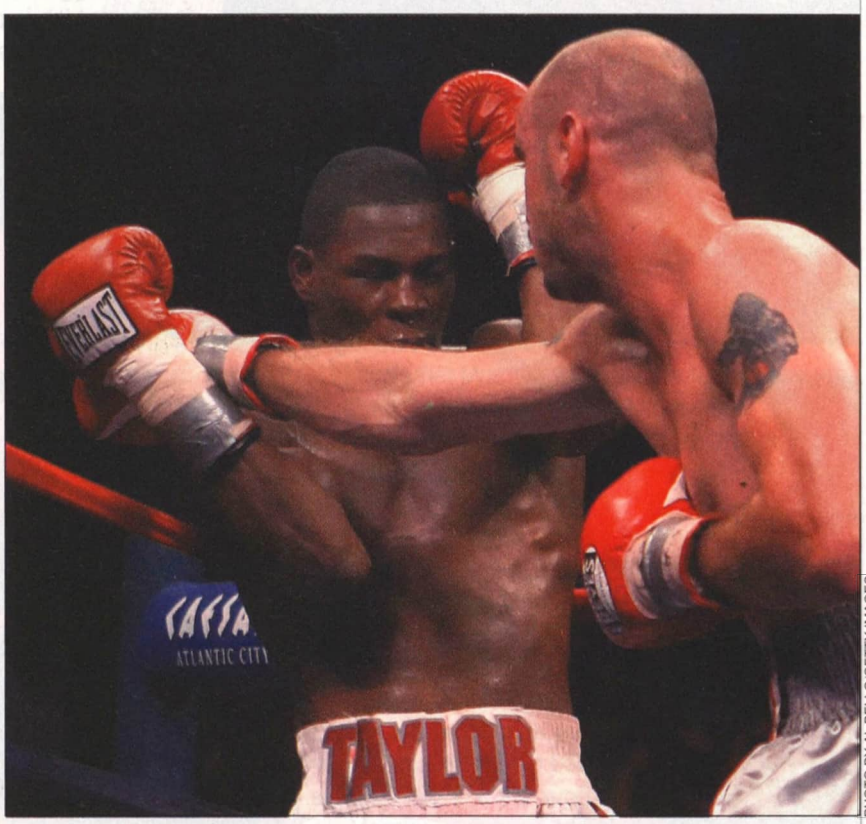
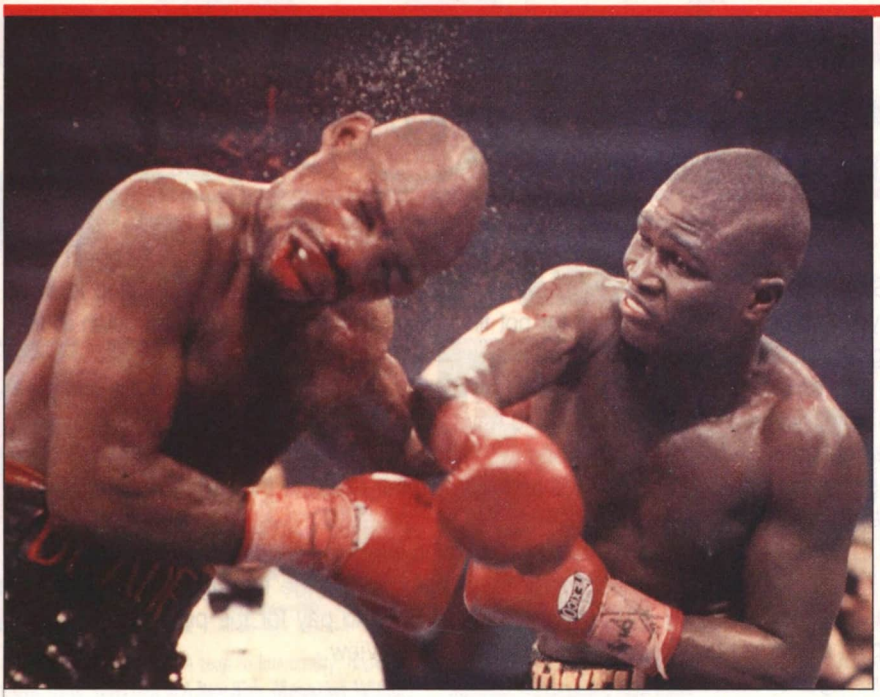


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Kelly Pavlik fires a right at Jermain Taylor en route to a thrilling knockout victory to capture the world middleweight championship. Reader Jeff Bollinger was among the many who were pumped by "The Ghost's" up-from-the-floor victory.



Reader Neil Corteo wondered if Iran Barkley had ever been knocked out, which, of course he has, seven times in fact. One of them came in 1993, when James Toney stopped "The Blade" to win the IBF super middleweight belt (pictured).

Editor-in-Chief Nigel Collins' editorial in the December issue made me angry and sad. I have followed boxing for more than 40 years and I'm provoked by his strange logic: If you like boxing, you are a violent and bloodthirsty person who enjoys dog fighting and cock fights! Boxing is to me, and I hope to most fans, a fascinating and dramatic combat sport. Yes, boxing can be brutal and dangerous. Every ring death and every boxer that develops the punch-drunk syndrome is a tragedy. But rules and regulations must continue to be improved. We need more fight doctors like Margaret Goodman. Mismatches, incompetent referees, and greedy promoters and managers are all a threat to the safety of our sport. Violence is not the reason I read THE RING. Nigel, you owe us an apology.

HELGE ERIKSEN
helge@kph.no

Opposing Viewpoints, Part II

I would like to congratulate one of my favorite boxers of all-time, Oscar De La Hoya, for recently purchasing THE RING, my favorite magazine since I was a young boy. Although some concerns were immediately raised about Oscar, who is also a promoter, manipulating articles and rankings, I do not believe that's going to happen. Oscar is a very fair person.

As a young kid growing up in Mexico, I would struggle to find THE RING magazine, but eventually I did, even though most of the time it meant traveling to the nearest big cities in Northern Mexico, like Monterrey, and paying a little more than the price printed on the label. I now live in the United States and have no trouble finding the magazine.

MANUEL D. ROSALES
San Antonio, TX

THE RING's sale to Golden Boy is haunting me like you wouldn't believe. Even if you have good intentions and even if, by some miracle, people believe your reassuring words, you've still opened yourself up to unavoidable problems. I'm a newspaper reporter in Indiana. Like you, we have been guaranteed editorial independence from our owners. But do you really think we're going to write something scathing about the boss? Believe me, every little story our boss comes up with makes its way to the top of our to-do list.

As human beings who have to pay the rent, what assurance can you give that De La Hoya will continue to be as open to criticism as any other boxer? If he fights and looks shot as a fighter or if he wins a decision you disagree with, will you still tell it like it is?

PAUL MINNIS
pminnis@therepublic.com

No Giveaways

I have been a loyal fan of THE RING and I recognize its titles over all others. The only flaw is that there are too many vacancies. I respect the number-one contender versus number-two contender method to fill vacancies, but I think it would be wise if you waited until the end of the year and gave the title to the number-one contender in weight classes where the title is vacant.

WILL GODDIESS
gnfgodiess@aol.com

Editor's note: While we certainly understand your frustration with championship vacancies, if THE RING "gave" titles to fighters, it would violate one of our bedrock principles: that titles must be won and lost in the ring.

The Bagg Has Landed!

Thanks for moving Jim Bagg's column, "Hitting On The Break," from *World Boxing* to THE RING. Bagg's words of wit and wisdom are a refreshing and entertaining addition to the already excellent "Bible Of Boxing."

SCOTT MIERZWIAK
Toledo, Ohio

Barkley Blowouts

Was Iran Barkley ever knocked out and, if so, by who?

NEIL CORTEO
casacorteo@tampabay.rr.com

Editor's note: Barkley was stopped seven times in an overall career record of 43-19-1 (28). The first came against Robbie Simms in 1984, and was a knockout. The other six were TKOs, scored by Nigel Benn, James Toney, Adolpho Washington, Henry Maske, Thomas Williams, and Keith McKnight. ■

Looking Ahead

By Joe Santoliquito

A Super February

If only boxing were like other sports. Schedule the Super Bowl for the first Sunday in February, and you can bet that it's going to happen on that date. In boxing, if you look hard enough, you can probably find a betting line on whether a signed fight will even take place. At this point, February is shaping up to be a pretty solid month for the fight game, but we reserve the right to back away from that statement because fighters always reserve the right to back away from their fights.

If worse comes to worst, there's always that Super Bowl.

February 2, Oleg Maskaev vs. Samuel Peter, Madison Square Garden: Peter, 29-1 (22), is coming off a bout in which he had to come off the canvas three times against **Jameel McCline**. Maskaev, 34-5 (26), is coming off a career-long 14-month absence that included a postponement of his scheduled October 6 bout with Peter. "The Big O" was officially sidelined with herniated and bulging disks in his back, but some suspect that it had more to do with an aversion to "Nigerian Nightmares." Maskvaev's back is now okay, and after seeing Peter dropped three times, his psyche is probably in pretty good shape as well.

February 16, Kelly Pavlik vs. Jermain Taylor, the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, or Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City: Most people are surprised that Taylor invoked his rematch clause with Pavlik right away. Taylor's promoter, **Lou DiBella**, is not among them. "It shouldn't really be surprising," DiBella said. "Jermain has always reached out to fight the best. He knows by how the fight went that he's capable of winning. He has an excellent chance of reversing that first result. It was a great fight for boxing. Jermain did everything except win. Pavlik justifiably is getting the attention he deserves. These guys can fight 10 times and you'll never have a bad fight. I respect Jermain's decision to come back this quickly, and I support him 100 percent with his decision."

So does Pavlik and every fan who saw their initial encounter on September 29. This fight will not be for Pavlik's middleweight world championship, as it will be fought at a 166-pound catch weight. Pavlik, 32-0 (29), who stopped Taylor in the seventh round, will earn the biggest payday of his career. Taylor, 27-1-1 (17), can now stop kicking himself for not finishing Pavlik after sending him down in the second round.

"I'm down for a rematch," said Pavlik. "There are so many things I could have done better against Taylor. I gave him the second and the fifth rounds. I had a chance to look back over the tapes and pinpoint some of the things that I did wrong in that fight."

Though the location was not nailed down as of press time, one thing is for certain: Unlike the first fight, which was on HBO, we're going to have to pay for the privilege of seeing this one on HBO Pay-Per-View.

February 23, Vladimir Klitschko vs. Sultan Ibragimov, Madison Square Garden: Ibragimov, 22-0-1 (17), enters the fight with two signature victories, having decisioned shopworn veterans **Shannon Briggs** and **Evander Holyfield**. The last competitive fight for Klitschko, 49-3 (44), would have been 29 months prior, when he got off the canvas three times to decision Peter.

Listen Up

An intriguing bantamweight contest will take place January 10, in Osaka, Japan, at the Prefectural Gym, when THE RING's number-one contender, **Hozumi Hasegawa**, 22-2 (7), takes on number-eight contender **Simone Maludrottu**, 25-1 (10). Neither fighter has lost since 2001. ■

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Pavlik and Taylor will do it again in February

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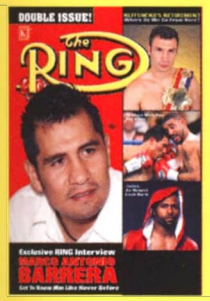

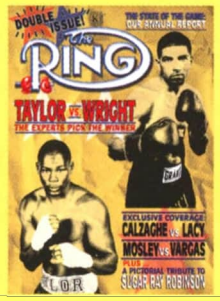

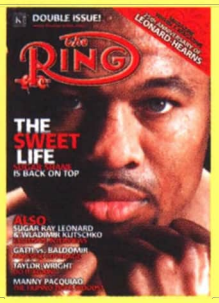

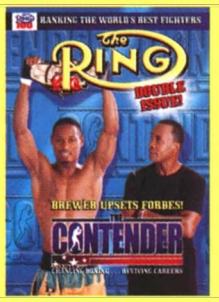

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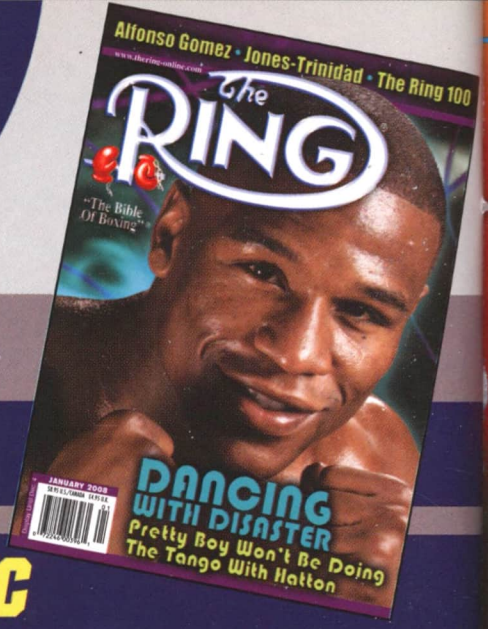

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